Converts to Islam

بسم الله الرحمن الرحیم

Converts to Islam

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Converts to Islam

Dedication

This compilation is dedicated to

. Ashok Hussain

. He inspired others to the true path even from a far

. Greatly loved and missed by many , but still alive in our hearts always

Please recite Sura-e-Fateha

Compiler's words

The compiler of this book of conversion stories has communicated with each convert who has contributed to this book , and has every confidence that all the stories used are genuine and authentic . Paper documentation has been kept to show that in each . case permission was granted for the use of the story

Zainab

www . convertstoislam . com

PREFACE

Bismillah-Ar-Rahman-Ar-Raheem

In the name of God the Beneficent the Merciful

. All thanks be to God and to Him be all praise

The light of Islam is attracting many who are wandering lonely in the darkness . Amidst this world of vain desires and materialism there is an ever-increasing number who are searching for a true purpose to this life that goes beyond our earthly existence . Many hearts are drawn to the complete way of life described within Islam , the truth of the Divine message that touches the inner being and the sense of

. satisfaction having found what they have been longing for

The journeys to Islam are many and varied , and from these stories we can see the Mercy of Allah (swt) at work . InshaAllah these stories will offer hope and encouragement to those navigating the path in search of truth , and will motivate us to work harder for the sake of Allah (swt) . Even as Muslims our journeys towards the . pleasure of Allah (swt) , and multiplying our devotion to Him , are everlasting

The stories in this collection have been sent in from all over the world , and as

far as we can attain are all truthful accounts . As this book consists of personal testimonies we cannot be held responsible for the accuracy of information given as factual within the content . Each story remains in the original wording of the writer , we have only corrected obvious spelling and grammatical errors , as a result each . story has it�s own unique appeal . We hope you enjoy our collection

Qualities of the God-fearing and the pious

He (the believer) kept his mind alive and killed (the desires of) his heart till his body became thin , his bulk turned light and an effulgence of extreme brightness shone for him . It lighted the way for him and took him on the (right) path . Different doors led him to the door of safety and the place of (his permanent) stay . His feet , balancing his body became fixed in the position of safety and comfort , because he kept his . heart (in good acts) and pleased his Allah

(Nahjul Balagha Imam Ali (as

InshaAllah we would like to start another collection of stories to be published in the future . If you are a new brother or sister to Islam and would like to tell your own story then please email it to Stories۷۸۶@aol . com . Please write your story into the email itself , rather than send an attachment . Please also state within the email what name you wish to be included in any future book , or if you

. would prefer to remain anonymous

A BLIND WOMAN SEES THE LIGHT

part ١

The name I am called by my Christian parents is Bobbie Evans , but the name I am known by in the Muslim community is Khadija Evans . This is the story of how my . husband and I came to embrace Islam

I can remember standing in the kitchen of the house I lived in when I was just seven or eight years old and looking towards the door that went outside . I prayed to a god whom I wasn�t sure existed and I begged Him to show himself to me if He was really . there . Nothing happened

I can remember being nine or ten years old and writing a letter to God and hiding it in the heat register in my bedroom , thinking God , if He existed , would come and . retrieve it and answer my prayers . But the next day , the letter was still there

I had always had a hard time accepting the existence of God , and of understanding the beliefs taught in Christian churches . Even though my parents weren�t very religious , and rarely went to church , they thought it was best that my two brothers and I go . We were allowed to choose our religion when we very young . I think I was about six or seven , and my brothers were one and two years older then I . I chose a Methodist church for no other reason then it was a

few blocks away from our house , and my brothers chose a Lutheran church because . it was also close , and I hadn�t chosen it

I went to the church until I was thirteen years old . I was baptized and confirmed there when I was ١١ . I went along with the baptism and confirmation because all children who were ١١ received confirmation , and if they hadn�t already been baptized , that was done at the same time . Even then I knew that doubts about God . and Christian teachings were things best kept to myself

When I was ١٣ my family moved to another town with no churches within walking distance , and my parents weren�t eager to get up early and drive us kids to church , and so our religious training stopped until I was ١٥ and my mom suddenly found religion . She began attending an Assembly of God church , occasionally dragging my dad along . I went willingly . I had already begun a search for God that wouldn�t end . until I was ٤٢ years old

I remember being �born again� . Caught up in the fervor of the hell and damnation that the minister preached at the Assembly of God church . I became �high on religion� thinking I had finally found �Him . � Little did I know , but the high would . be short lived , as I again began to have doubts and unanswered questions

When I was ١٧ I met the daughter

of an assistant Baptist minister and began going to their church . I had been sexually abused by my dad from the time I was at least six years old and I told the assistant minister about it . He arranged with my parents to let me live with him and his family in a type of �private foster care . � My dad paid him $١٠٠ a week . My parents also attended the church for a brief time , until the minister announced on the pulpit that my dad was a child molester . Before that though , my mom , dad and I were each . baptized at the church

One day after spending the day with my parents I returned to my foster home only to find the house empty . Cleaned out . Not a stick of furniture . We found out that the minister had been caught embezzling from the church and he and his family had left . town in a hurry . I returned to my parents home and the abuse

As a result of that incident what little faith I had in God was totally lost and I became an atheist . For the next ٢٥ years I would fluctuate between believing , wanting to . believe , and Agnosticism , and Atheism

When I was twenty-six , I went to three months of Rights of Initiation for Catholic Adults and then was baptized and confirmed in the Roman Catholic Church . I had been allowed to by-pass the

full year of classes because I hadn�t called the church to inquire about converting until three months before the Easter Vigil Mass when confirmation for adults was held .

I had entered the Catholic religion with the same philosophy that I had once heard Alcoholics Anonymous has , �Bring your body , your mind will follow . � I didn�t really believe in God , or in the core teachings of the Catholic Church , but I wanted so badly to believe in a power higher then myself , that I went faithfully to mass seven days a week , hoping that somehow I would start to believe . But after several months , I began to realize that it wasn�t going to happen , and my mass attendance became a once a week thing , then once a month , until when I was thirteen and met the man who today is my husband and who wasn�t Catholic , I stopped attending mass altogether .

I had never told anyone , before my husband , that I didn�t believe in God . I don�t think he took me seriously at first . I don�t think he had ever known an Atheist .

My husband is ٢٩ years older then me . We�ve had a wonderful marriage for these last ١٠ years . When we first met , I still desperately wanted to believe , and kept making him promise me that �When you get to Heaven� he would ask God to give me the strength to believe

and he if at all possible , he would give me a sign , one that I couldn�t chalk up to my , imagination , so I would know there really was a god . He always promised me he . would

We were living in rural Alabama when I was ٣٢ years old . I developed ulcerations on both corneas and when they healed , I was legally blind . Because of damage from infection that had been done to the tissue that donated corneas would have to adhere to , I couldn�t find an eye surgeon who believed that transplanted corneas . wouldn�t be rejected

I was still searching for God . I was searching for hope of something better then what this world had to offer . Some kind of evidence of the chance for existence after death . Some way to achieve it . I listened to Christian programs on the Trinity Broadcasting Network , even though I couldn�t find any ministers on the station who�s opinion I trusted . I watched anyway , hoping that one would say something that would click in my mind , and I would finally know , that �Yes , there really is a god . � None of them ever said anything that caused that connection to happen , though many said things . that confused me even more

During the first ١٠ years after I became legally blind , I tried attending different churches , Baptist again , Assembly of God again , non-Denominational , Church

of God , Mormon , and even studied up on Wicca . But I always lost interest after just a few months . Things the religions taught just didn�t add up . There were just too many things left to faith . Things that had no proof other then one�s faith . I couldn�t believe something when the only proof were some words in a book that in . large part didn�t make sense

I remember one night when I was about ٣٥ years old , lying in bed and praying to God , whom I still wasn�t sure existed , and asking Him that if He did exist to lead me to . someone who could help me to believe . But I found no one

At age ٣٦ I acquired a braille Bible and started reading it , once again hoping to find proof of God�s existence . But with the Bible being so hard to understand , with so much of it not really being explainable , I lost interest after reading just a few of its . books

At about that time , though still wanting to find God , I gave up my search . I had . become completely disillusioned with religion

On September ١١ , ٢٠٠١ I was sitting at my computer . It was before ٩ a . m . and as usual the television , which was sitting to my right , was turned on for background noise . I heard the sound that is made to notify viewers of

an important news announcement . I stopped and turned towards the TV . A reporter began talking and one of the towers of the World Trade Center showed in the background . He said an accident had happened . A small plane had hit one of the towers of the World Trade Center . I�m legally blind , but I could see well enough to know that it wasn�t a small plane that had hit the tower . The hole was massive . And . I didn�t think it was possible to accidentally hit something so big

As I watched , another plane flew into the other tower . I couldn�t see the plane itself , it was too small for me to see , but I saw the fireball that exploded away from the . building

I jumped up and ran into the bedroom and told my husband to hurry and get up because terrorists were flying planes into the World Trade Center buildings ! He immediately got out of bed and came in to the living room and sat in his recliner and . began to watch . It was about ٩ a . m

part ٢

As time went by it was announced that a plane had been flown into the Pentagon and another hijacked plane had crashed in Pennsylvania . I wondered when it would end ? And what in the world was going on ? ? ? The reporter said it looked like �debris� was falling from the building . My husband said it

was people jumping . Something he has never been able to forget . I was grateful that my vision was to bad for me to be able to make out what even looked like �debris� . �The reporter said a part of the first tower had fallen away from the building . He spoke in a kind of hesitant voice . Now I wonder if he was unsure of what he was seeing . Because we later found out that a part of the building hadn�t fallen away . .The building had completely collapsed

A female reporter was crying and a male reporter hugged her . I was crying too . And .my husband hugged me

For weeks afterward I would start crying for no apparent reason . I�d be riding on the bus and have to turn my head towards the window and pretend I was looking out .so that others wouldn�t see the tears escaping my eyes

When we were in a restaurant , I�d have to use my napkin to dab the tears welling up in my eyes before the other diners noticed and wondered if I was some kind of a .nut

I was Christian then and I cared . And I was devastated . I couldn�t understand how a religion could promote such violence , as the media was saying Islam did . It made no sense to me . So I decided to find out for myself . One way or another I wanted to .know the truth

Because of my partial blindness I was limited to information from the internet . Finding braille books about Islam in braille or ink print that was large enough for me to read was impossible . I was able to use a computer because I had magnification . software installed so I could enlarge the font on the screen to a size that I could read

I did searches and I began to read about Islam . I went to web sites that taught the basics of Islam , and I joined Muslim women�s e-groups where I was able to ask and . get answers that I confirmed through further research

I�ve always been a sceptic . It�s always been hard for me to believe something that I didn�t understand . I was never one to believe something simply because someone . said it was so . I had to know it in my mind as well as in my heart

While studying Islam I learned that the god Muslims worship is the same god as that of Christians and Jews . The god of Abraham and Moses . I found that Islam doesn�t promote or condone hatred of non-Muslims , nor does it condone the killing of . innocent people

By studying Islam I found the answers that the media wasn�t telling us and I came to know that Islam is the True Religion . I read a lot of convincing evidence , but the things that proved to me that there is a god , and that Islam

is the True Religion and that that the Qur�an is the Word of God , were those in the Qur�an itself . The things that are of a scientific nature . Things that have only been discovered by scientists in the last ١٠٠ years . The only one who could have known .those things ١۴٠٠ years ago was God

For example , One day I was at a web site that was about some of the scientific proofs in the Qur�an . One of the verses in the Qur�an tells about the death of our own solar system . Al-Rahman ٣٧-٣٨

When the sky is torn apart , so it was (like) a red rose like ointment . Then which of� the favors of your lord will you deny ? � There was a link that went to the NASA web site . When I clicked the link I had no idea what was going to be on the next page , but what I saw took my breath away . Tears came to my eyes . I knew - if I had had any .doubts left - I knew at the moment , that Islam was the True Religion of God

The page the link took me to showed what looked like a rose . It was the �Cat�s Eye Nebula . � Which was an exploding star ٣٠٠٠ light years away . It had been photographed with the Hubble Space Telescope . Scientists say that it is the same fate that awaits our own

solar system . Muslims refer to it as the �Rose Nebula . � It had been described in the Qur�an ۱۴۰۰ years ago . People back then had no way of knowing about it . Only God could have known.

After accepting in my mind as well as in my heart that Islam is the True Religion , I knew that I was already a Muslim and the only thing left was to profess my faith.

I looked in an internet directory for mosques in my community . I called the one in the next town and told the person who answered the phone that I wanted to convert to Islam , and asked him when I could make my Shahada . He told me to be there at ۴ p . m . on Saturday when the imam would also be there . I told him that I ride the bus everywhere and it wouldn�t be running late enough for me to be able to get back home and so could I come earlier ? He said not to worry , someone would give me a ride home . I arrived as scheduled , and as God had scheduled , so began my new life . I have since come to realize that on that day , the greatest event of my life occurred . I had always thought that the most wonderful thing to ever happen to me was the day that I married my husband . But I now know it wasn�t

The most important day of my life was the day I made my Shahada and accepted . Islam as the way of life God intended me to live . It was the day I acknowledged that . Islam is the way to salvation , to Heaven , and I made a choice to practice it

I can�t say my husband was thrilled by my reverting to Islam . He believed what the media was saying about Muslims and the religion . He didn�t like it that I went to the mosque several evenings a week and left him home alone to be bored . One night after he was finished complaining about me going again I sat down a few feet away from him and I calmly told him , �I will never ask you to practice a religion you don�t believe in . I love you too much to try and force that on you . But I do want you to learn about Islam so that you will at least understand what it is I believe . � I then stood up and went into the bedroom and finished dressing to go to the mosque . I kissed him . goodbye and I left

When I returned home I found his whole attitude had changed . He was bright and . cheerful . That night , before going to bed , he began to learn about Islam

My husband began going to the mosque with me . While I studied with the sisters , he would

talk with a brother and ask him questions . At home he read things on the internet , and books that he had borrowed from the mosque . We would discuss different things . he was learning , and I would point things out to him

When the day came and he told me about how some aspect of Islam was to be practiced , in a �know it all� tone of voice , as if it were a fact , something that I myself didn�t know , I asked him to tell me �How do you know that ? ? � and he replied , �Because it�s in the Qur�an ! � I was stunned ! He believed ! He knew that Islam was True ! If it was in the Qur�an , as far as he was concerned it was true ! Thirty-six days after I publicly professed my faith in God and His messenger , prophet Muhammad , my husband professed his . We had an Islamic marriage ceremony the same evening . I cried when my husband made his Shahada . I knew we would be in ! Eternity together

A month before , a brother had asked me what I thought the chances of my husband converting were . I told him , �Zero . � I said , �I can�t imagine someone so dramatically changing their beliefs after having believed something else for ٧٠ years . But ١۴ days before his ٧١st birthday he embraced Islam as his religion and his

way of life . In the Muslim community we have found another family . We have found friendship , love and acceptance that was taught in the Christian religions we practiced at different points in my life , but that we felt never actually existed among . most of the members of the churches we went to

Many of the Muslims in our area are immigrants , but we have found no intolerance of Americans whether they are Muslim or not . We were both welcomed into the family of Islam the very first time each of us went to the mosque . We�ve always felt . welcome and accepted

Since embracing Islam We have found direction and purpose for our lives . We have found the meaning for our existence . We have come to realize that we really are here only for a short time and that what comes afterwards is far better then the fleeting . pleasures that this world has to offer us

I have found a sense of security concerning life after death that I had never known before . We have both come to see the problems that we once saw as being major as actually being opportunities to grow . We thank God for what we do have , as well for what we don�t . Today we are Muslim . We still care about ٩/١١ . I still cry when I think a little too much about the events of that day . My husband still remembers the people jumping

from the buildings . We wish all we could say about that day was where we had been when we heard that the WTC had been attacked . But we did see it happen , and it was the most devastating thing to ever happen in our lives . But from tragedy came victory . From death has come the knowledge that we will have life after our death . And it will be spent together.

Holy Quran ٣ : ١٣٨

This is a clear statement for men , and guidance and an admonition to those who guard against evil.

JAMES �JIHAD� FARRELL

part ١

I do not intend to bore you with preaching or beg for sympathy with this story . My intention is simple : To inform Muslims as well as non-Muslims that there is a greater realm of Islam other than that what you witness by some misguided Muslims and what you see from the television . I also do not intend to ruin the reputation of anyone mentioned in this story.

It seems like yesterday when I was a little boy growing up in the inner city of Chicago . Mom and Dad would both work full-time jobs trying to support a family of ten . Things just didn�t work out the way they planned . Dad began drinking heavily and soon took up a habit of gambling and abuse . Whenever dad was around he was either drunk or on his way to jail; dad would frequent the Chicago jails many times a month.

In my opinion my father had been arrested about ٢٠٠-٣٠٠ times in his lifetime . Whenever mom and dad were together in the same house there would always be a fight and one of the two would need medical attention . There were a few incidents that I recall when dad pushed mom and mom split dads head open with a hammer�and yet another incident when mom slammed an iron in dads face�then another time she broke a beer bottle over dad�s head . Maybe he deserved it; I do not know . When the fighting between mom and dad would end , the children got the end results . My brother and I have been whipped with hangers , wires , poles , glass , pots and pans , sticks , bottles , cables� . Whatever they could get their hands on we were hit with it . One time my mother had caught my brother and I playing with matches . I told the truth and she only slapped me , my brother lied and had his hand stuck in an open flame on the stove until his skin boiled . The level of stress in our household was so extreme my mother had suffered from two maybe three miscarriages; one of the miscarriages she had reached passed six months of her pregnancy when the fetus exploded in her stomach � dad was in jail . My parents had gone through a lot . There were times when there was practically nothing to

eat . Many nights mom would only have eggs and bread to prepare for dinner . I remember she would prepare our dinner and whatever we didn�t eat that was her meal , if we ate our entire share she would go to bed hungry . This happened for many years . Before I reached the age of ١٠ I began feeling the need to commit suicide . . With everything happening around me I felt as if there was no reason to live at all

Although my parents had sent us to weekly Catholic school and frequent the Church , my heart didn�t feel alive . I would simply feel the need to go in order to get away from what went on at home . In school I wasn�t the brightest child . As a ۶th grader I had a reading level of a ١st grader . Every year throughout elementary school I was ordered to take summer school in order to pass to the next grade . I had failed the ٢nd grade and hardly made through the remaining next ۶ . It was in the elementary school when I learned how to steal . It would become a constant habit . Whenever I had the chance I would steal anything and everything I could get my hands on . Sooner than later my brother had joined me . We went to Gas Stations and stole candy , then to Department stores and stole toys . There was one time when mom gave

us a few dollars to buy dad a �Father�s Day� gift . My brother and I decided to spend the money on popcorn and nachos and stole his gift�Evidently we were caught and were about to be arrested; Mom came to our rescue .

A few years later my brother had went in his direction and I went my own way . I gave up on stealing and began writing music/poetry and playing guitar . I eventually joined a band and would use the �jam� sessions as a scapegoat to get away from my problems . In High School my brother had befriended many drug addicts and soon he began doing drugs . I am not saying he was a drug addict but he did drugs like the rest of them .

When I was about ۱۲ maybe ۱۳ I began working as an electrician helper with my uncle . I held that job until I was about ۱۶ , then I began working on my own doing electrical , carpentry and painting contract jobs . This helped me move out of my parents� home and move into my first apartment . Around this time I had met a girl who would become my fianc� within a matter of months . I was the extremely shy type . As matter of fact she had asked me out on a date instead of the other way around . Needless to say , we were together and wanted to get married . About a year or ۲ into our

relationship she began practicing Islam . She was born into a family where her father was Muslim and her mother was Catholic . My fianc� was jammed in the middle; simply confused . She began informing me of the Muslim religion and I was completely turned off by the whole idea . The more she spoke of it the more I pushed her away . There was a period of time where I didn�t want to have anything to do with her simply because she was practicing a foreign thing . The reason of my hate toward the Muslims is due to my upbringing , the actions of the majority of Muslims and the news media . Every Arab/Muslim that I had ever met was no different than me , if they were different they were worse . I knew Muslims who did drugs , attempted murder , .fornication , lesbians , etc

At this period in time I was in a prime time of arrogance and didn�t even know it . I felt as if I was a living piece of God and nothing could destroy me . I felt as though I were better than everyone else . Nevertheless , I was a lonely person who needed someone by his side . My fianc� had given me a Qur�an as a gift for my ١٨th birthday . As I received the gift I cringed and felt like throwing it away . However , I simply stored it away in my closet not feeling

the need to disrespect her . A few years earlier I got the urge to read . Once I began reading I couldn�t stop . My father had once told me��When you were a younger we couldn�t get a book in your hands for anything in the world , now we can�t get a book out of your hands . � Now at this point of my life I had read numerous books and I was feeling that my philosophy of me being a part of God was a little shaky . While the Qur�an was accumulating dust in my closet I had prayed to God that He would send me a book or a sign with a key to all of the answers in the world . May I remind you that I knew nothing what the Qur�an was and never before have I even .touched a Qur�an let alone hear about it

One night , after I had cleaned the house , I stood in the kitchen looking onward toward the living room . The house looked beautiful . The round glass table to my right; the soft tender gray carpeting below my feet; the smooth arch dividing the dining area from the living area; then finally a comfortable dim light illuminated the setting . I suddenly had an urge to pick up the Qur�an and read it . I sat in my favorite tan colored recliner next to the end table . With the Qur�an in my hands I began to read

the introduction of Abdullah Yusuf Ali . Before I knew it tears had flowed from my eyes . I wanted to beat myself senseless from how stubborn I was not to read this earlier . I read the same thing I believed all my life with a fine-tooth comb laying it all out straight . My heart overfilled with satisfaction and pain at the same time . Immediately I had called my fianc� and apologized for being an imbecile . We then agreed that our lives would indeed change and we would have to either get married or separate . for good

I was starving to learn more about Islam . Now that I had read the entire Qur�an I wanted to learn how to pray . I then began reading books about prayer and basically taught myself how to pray . For a person who felt that they were a piece of God and now bowing down to God this was probably the hardest thing I could do . I was embarrassed toward myself for praying to a thing that wasn�t even there . I then found books with English transliteration (followed along with the audio) and taught myself how to recite Qur�an . It was at this point where I wanted to go to the Mosque . I was given directions and hesitated many times . I would drive up to the Mosque , circle around a few times and turn back home . Then I started having dreams . May I point out

that I had never seen a Mosque before this , nor have I ever been inside one . I didn�t even know what a Mosque was . Needless to say , I began having dreams that would twist my soul yet wake me with passion . I had a dream the night after I circled the Mosque . My dream began�I was walking in a well-lighted , flat levelled building . The carpet was soft and green and there were pillars/columns throughout this structure . Inside this building were friends from school and relatives that made my brief stay welcoming . The next morning I woke and went to the Mosque . And just like inside my dream I saw the very same setting; Green carpet , pillars/columns and people that made me feel at home . Some time later I had yet another dream of myself running through a field of grass . An army was behind me chasing me and chanting �Kill him , Kill him ! � I then came to a safe ground and prayed to God that I would be safe . I was then given ٩ men to help me defeat this army of thousands . Each man was given a stick for battle except me; I held a double-sided axe . As the opposing army grew nearer I closed my eyes and swung . When my eyes opened the opposing army was defeated . My army hadn�t a single scratch on them . I then appeared all alone

in a Mosque contemplating on the victory . As I sat on a bench at the backside of the Mosque with my head down I felt a sudden presence . A hand touched my thigh . His perfect voice said �Victory . � I replied , �yes , with ten men . � He commented by adding , �With God you were limitless . � I then picked up my head and saw the most beautiful man I could ever imagine . His skin was the most perfect tone , his voice was gentle and soft but manly , and his presence was clear and comforting . He was clean from head to toe . His teeth shinned gleaming white and his beard covered . his cheeks with style . I would have many dreams like this one for about ٢ years

part ٢

In the summer of ١٩٩٨ I had went to a Mosque on the North side of Chicago called the �Muslim Community Centre (M . C . C .)� for a conference . At the conference I had publicly declared that I was Muslim . The man who had walked me through the testimony of faith was Jamal Badawi , whom I had no idea who he was . I knew that I just put a huge responsibility on my shoulders and my entire life would completely . change

By the spring of ١٩٩٩ there was a Mosque being built from a tavern about ٣-٤ miles away from my home . The only problem

it was in a neighborhood I didn�t belong . The fact of the matter is I lived in an all , white neighborhood and the Mosque was in an all black neighborhood . The whites and blacks are not allowed to walk through each other�s neighborhoods unless it�s for drugs , prostitution , or briefly passing through by car . I was the type that didn�t care . I walked the ٣-٤ miles to help the Muslims refurbish the Mosque . Throughout the whole summer of ١٩٩٩ I walked back and forth at least twice a week . During this period I was harassed , spit at , rocks were thrown at me , children cursed at me�one of the many times I was harassed it was by the Police . I had just left the Mosque from the Friday prayer and I didn�t reach ٢ blocks and an unmarked Police car pulled up next to me , and ٢ uniformed men began shouting at me . �Turn around and put your hands on the car , now ! � I slowly turned and placed my hands on the car . As one officer stuck his hands in my mouth and searched my entire body the other officer asked , �What are doing in this neighborhood boy ? � I said , �It is my Sabbath day . I came to pray . � He replied , �You�re not suppose to be in this neighborhood . Now go back to your neighborhood and I don�t

wanna see you back here . � I then walked home and returned back the following week . I continued to do this until the winter of ١٩٩٩ . This is the winter that changed my family forever . Up until this point I hadn�t been completely open with my family about my conversion . I knew that they would take it hard and probably beat me and throw me out so I felt that taking it step by step would be the best idea�it wasn�t . One night my father came home from work with snow all over his body and shoes . He didn�t bother brushing it off . He charged through the door like a madman and darted after me yelling and threatening my life . I just sat on the couch gripping the cushions hoping he wouldn�t smash my head into the wall . With his fist locked he brought it up to my face with extreme torment . Something held him back from knocking my head off . I know if it were a few years earlier I�d be in the hospital . My father just doesn�t stop when he reaches his boiling point . After he yelled and said he�d kill me I was no longer welcome in his home , my mother felt the same . I had nowhere to go . I began sleeping in my car and spending most of my time in libraries . It was very hard for me to get around because that

winter Chicago had endured the worst blizzard since the ١٩٧٠�s . Many nights I thought I was going to die due to the cold and hunger . I finally went back to the original Mosque I had dreamed about and slept there for one night; that�s all they allowed . Soon after that a friend had made a deal with me . I would build a prayer area in the ٢nd level of his muffler shop and in return he would let me live there until I found a place of my own . As I built the prayer area I found a job and paid my way through college and eventually joined the Muslim Student Association (M . S . A .) . By January ٢٠٠٠ a friend of mine asked me if I wanted to share an apartment paying ١/٣ of the rent . I agreed . By the next month I was on my way to Saudi Arabia to make my pilgrimage . There is no other way to explain my experience other than�making the pilgrimage is like reliving and witnessing the history of Islam replay all over again . You�ll look at the mountains and catch a glimpse of the companions of the Prophet Muhammad journeying into the night; you�ll look at the Ka�ba and witness the destruction of the idols by the Prophet Abraham; you�ll stand on the mountain of Arafat and hear the final sermon of the Prophet Muhammad�When I left Saudi Arabia my heart cried to go

. back

A few months after my return to the United States I was engaged for the second time . The engagement lasted about ٥ months . At the ending of ٢٠٠٠ I was engaged for the ٣rd time . This time there was more chemistry between the two of us and our level of understanding life was mutual . We had scheduled our wedding to be in the spring of ٢٠٠١ . Early February my fianc� had called me to inform me that she had cancer and was calling of the wedding and our relationship . More than anything I was hurt for her , not by her , but for her . She was a new convert , like myself and her family wasn�t supporting her at all . I knew what she was feeling and I knew the loneliness she was feeling . That was the end between us . It seemed as if every time I tried to plan out my life and make the decision it never worked out . I just gave up on trying to get . married and left it all up to God

March ٢٠٠١ , I had just returned from a week vacation in Florida and went to my favourite pizza restaurant . I developed a relationship with the owner from going there almost daily for about a year . Her and her husband had asked me if I wanted to get married and I told them , �no . � I said that I gave up

on it . They told me to go home , take a shower and come back because they had some one for me to meet . Again , I left it all up to God . I went home prayed to God and did what they asked me to do . It was March ٨th ٢٠٠١ at ٩ p . m . when I arrived at her house . I was engaged ٣ times before and on each engagement I was nervous , but not this time . I was as calm as I would be if I were to hang out with my friends . I entered into the house with my two friends (later to find out they were the girls� aunt and uncle) and I met a man who greeted me at the door , �Asalamu Alaykum . � I replied , �Wa Alaykum Salam . � I sat down and chatted with this man for a few moments and out came his daughter . We spoke for a few hours and I found myself beginning to wonder how I got where I was . Not so much the place and time but about a year prior to this I was homeless , living in my car . Needless to say , this woman that I had just met had became my wife . We were married July ٨th ٢٠٠١ .

In the early weeks of November ٢٠٠١ our lives had changed . Due to the actions of a few delusional people smashing

into the world trade center building two months prior , the United States government went out on a full fledge war on Islam . The FBI paid many Islamic charity organizations a visit and shut them down; the Global Relief Foundation was one of them , I worked there since ١٩٩٩ . When the FBI raided the foundation they just didn�t shut down the organization under false pretences they ruined our reputation . They took everything from our organization including extension cords , hairbrushes , hair spray and moose , computers that were never used , fax machines , copy machines , cell phones , poems , personal files , etc . They took my house and car keys and refused to give them back . They drained our personal checking accounts from every last penny . They left us with nothing . And after they did that they raided our homes and invaded our privacy . Still to this day they have not found one penny used in the wrong way or used in any way other than that of supporting humanitarian aid . Their case is bogus . My wife and I were only married ٤ months when all of this took place . The FBI had left us with only $٣٠ , that�s what was in my pocket . We had bills that needed to be paid , rent was due; almost no food in the house and Eid Al Fitr was in a day or so . But like always Allah

. was there to help

I worked two jobs , sometimes ٣ to get back where we needed to be . At the same time I had reunited with my mother and sisters after a few years of silence . On November ۶th ٢٠٠٢ , the first day of Ramadan , my son Amir James Farrell was born . My heart melted the first time I held him . I was there throughout the entire delivery and helped every step of the way . I cut the umbilical cord the first chance I got I kissed the person whom Allah has allowed me to raise , my son . Amir is my pride and joy and Laila (my wife) is my strength and comfort . Many people do not realize the importance a woman has in Islam . To conclude on this , I came to respect my mother . so much more due to Islam and the birth of my son

Early February ٢٠٠٣ I had reunited with my father . The last time I had seen or spoke . to him was when he had threatened my life�I was happy to see him again

There is so much more I can write and so many details I had left out but I did not want to bore anyone . My wife always tell me , �When you are feeling down just pick up a ��pen and write all the things you are grateful for

. This brief story is a sample of just that

: Holy Quran ۶

This is the guidance of Allah(swt) , He guides thereby whom he pleases of His servants; and if they had set up others (with Him) , certainly what they did would have become ineffectual for them.

NATIVE AMERICAN MUSLIM

My name is Mahir Abdal-Razzaaq El and I am a Cherokee Blackfoot American Indian who is Muslim . I am known as Eagle Sun Walker . I serve as a Pipe Carrier Warrior for the North-eastern Band of Cherokee Indians in New York City.

There are other Muslims in our group . For the most part , not many people are aware of the Native American contact with Islam that began over one thousand years ago by some of the early Muslim travellers who visited us . Some of these Muslim travellers ended up living among our people.

For most Muslims and non-Muslims of today , this type of information is unknown and has never been mentioned in any of the history books . There are many documents , treaties , legislation and resolutions that were passed between ١٦٠٠s and ١٨٠٠s that show that Muslims were in fact here and were very active in the communities in which they lived . Treaties such as Peace and Friendship that was signed on the Delaware River in the year ١٧٨٧ bear the signatures of Abdel-Khak and Muhammad Ibn Abdullah . This treaty details our continued right to exist as a community in the areas of commerce , maritime shipping , and current form of government at that time which was

in accordance with Islam . According to a federal court case from the Continental Congress , we help put the breath of life in to the newly framed constitution . All of the documents are presently in the National Archives as well as the Library of Congress .

If you have access to records in the state of South Carolina , read the Moors Sundry Act of ١٧٩٠ . In a future article , Inshallah , I will go in to more details about the various tribes , their languages; in which some are influenced by Arabic , Persian , Hebrew words . Almost all of the tribe�s vocabulary includes the word Allah . The traditional dress code for Indian women includes the kimah and long dresses . For men , standard fare is turbans and long tops that come down to the knees . If you were to look at any of the old books on Cherokee clothing up until the time of ١٨٣٢ , you will see the men wearing turbans and the women wearing long head coverings . The last Cherokee chief who had a Muslim name was Ramadhan Ibn Wati of the Cherokees in ١٨٦٦ .

Cities across the United States and Canada bear names that are of Indian and Islamic derivation . Have you ever wondered what the name Tallahassee means ? It means that He Allah will deliver you sometime in the future .

The Message , July ١٩٩٦

Holy Quran ١٠ : ٥٧

O men ! There has come to you indeed an

admonition from your Lord and a healing for what is in the breasts and guidance and a . mercy for the believers

DR . BILAL ABDUL–ALIM

Personally , I embraced Islam at the age of ۲۴ , in the summer of ۱۹۷۵ , while studying medicine at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston , Texas . After a long day of study , I went to bed on a Saturday night with no intention of becoming a Muslim . However , two things happened during that night that would change my life completely . First of all , I had a dream in which I was commanded by a strong and firm voice , to embrace Islam immediately . I was reminded of how I had previously studied comparative religion at Wesleyan University , but refused to accept Islam even though I felt in my heart that it was the most practical way of life . When I woke up the next morning , I sat on the edge of the bed contemplating what to do , when the telephone rang . The call came from my ex-roommate from Wesleyan who had embraced Islam after graduation and was living in Washington , D . C . At that time , he was studying to be an attorney at Catholic University School of Law . This phone call was the second and . final thing that convinced me to embrace Islam immediately

My friend asked me , �Are you ready to become a Muslim ? � I replied , �Why are

you calling me this early in the morning with such a question ? � He answered in the following way , �Last night , I had a dream . In that dream , I saw you smiling , surrounded by a sort of spiritual light (called Noor in Islam) . Then , I heard a strong and powerful voice saying , �Allah has made this man a Muslim in the night and Allah has given him the name , Bilal Abdul-Alim (٣ times) . So , your job is to call him in the morning , and invite him to accept Islam and , give him his new name . � My friend continued by saying , �Don�t play games with me ! Tell me what happened ! � I then related my experience the night before with tears in my eyes . A few days later , I drove non-stop from Houston , Texas to Washington , D . C to accept Islam in the presence of my dear friend , Attorney Haroun G . Cook .

Holy Quran ١٤ : ١٢

And what reason have we that we should not rely on Allah(swt) ? , And He has Indeed guided us in our ways; and certainly we would bear with patience your persecution of us; and on Allah(swt) should the believers rely .

JAMEKA NEIL

I will say right away that I am very young . I am only ١٨ , and that fact seems to astound most people . I think it is proof that we

. are never too young to begin looking for God , or to understand His truth

I was raised Christian , nondenominational . We were never big churchgoers , but we always knew who our God was and what our obligation was to Him . In my living room to this day hangs a big velvet painting of Jesus as a black man . That left a huge imprint on me , because it made God real to me . Not only did he come to earth as a . man , but also he was black like me

In my preteen years I was a crusader for Christ . I wanted to convert the world and save souls . I believed blindly ١٠٠٪ in everything that was given to me by the Bible and my pastor/youth leader . Then one day I ran across something in the Bible that didn�t sound anything like the God who I had learned to love and obey . I thought perhaps I was just too young to understand and took it to a more knowledgeable . Christian who confirmed that it was what I thought it was . My world fell apart

I read the Bible , cover-to-cover , and marked along the way all of the things that were contradictory or ungodly . By the time I got to revelations I had a large segment of the Bible marked as invalid . So , thinking maybe I needed to look at it in a historical perspective I did my history

work . There I found even more hypocrisy , blasphemy , and human tampering with Holy Scriptures . What shocked me was the story of the council of Nice where human men �divinely guided� decided which text would be in the Bible and which ones . needed editing

I also had to ask myself how God could be three and one at the same time . What happens to a good man like Ghandi when he dies without Jesus ? Does Hitler get to go to heaven if he accepts Christ as his lord and saviour ? What about those who have never been exposed to Christianity ? I was once told that the trinity was part of the essence of God and that since the breadth and scope of God is beyond my understanding I should simply believe . I couldn�t worship a God I couldn�t . understand

I never lost my faith in God , I just decided that Christianity was not the right path for me to travel . I felt no kinship with fellow believers . I never felt anything special while attending service except that I was doing an obligatory service to God . So I wandered faithless , looking for something to hold on to . In my search I found Wicca , the Bahai . faith , and finally Islam

I studied Islam quietly , on my own , in secret , for two years . I wanted to be able to separate fact from fiction . I did not want

to confuse Islam with the cultures that claim to practice Islam while instituting things that are clearly against all that Allah has revealed to us . I wanted to make the distinction between the religion and the societies that adopted it . That took time and patience . I met a lot of helpful brothers and sisters via e-mail who answered all of my .questions and opened their lives up for me to examine

I never liked the image that I was handed as to what a woman was . In popular culture we are portrayed as very sexy , lady like , independent enough so that men have no real responsibility toward us or the children they help create , but dependant enough that we are continually in search of a new man . The average woman on the street is honked at , whistled at , has had her butt or breasts pinched , slapped , rubbed , or ogled by some strange man . I never agreed with any of that and never .found a �come on� flattering

In Christianity I was taught that as a woman I should not teach in church or question the authority of any man in public . The picture painted of women in Christianity was one of inferiority . We were supposed to be chaste and silent with children about our feet . In Islam I found a voice , a system that gave me ultimate respect for being a mother and acknowledged the fact that

I was equal to man in every way except one : physical strength . The hadith are littered with stories of women who spoke publicly and Islamic history is full of women . who were leaders . It was a theology that I could respect because it respected me

I had to ask myself if I really wanted to be like all of the people I saw around me . Who was really oppressed ? The girl wearing skin-tight jeans getting catcalls from boys rolling by in cars was not free . She was society�s whore and she got no respect . I was thankful that my mother had never allowed me to wear such things , not that I ever wanted to , but her disapproval was an added incentive . After examining the position of the Muslim woman and what I felt to be truth in my heart , how could I ? deny Islam

Six weeks ago I made the decision to convert to Islam . I did so and have not looked back since . My friends respect it because they see that it has not changed who I am and what I stand for , in fact it has backed it up . My advise to any woman out there is : to ask herself these questions

? What do you want your daughter to believe about herself

? How should she allow herself to be treated

? Is she really born with evil tendencies because she is a descendant of Eve

How do you want

? her to feel about her body

? What are you modelling for her

? What image of womanhood are you promoting

? How do men treat you and how do you allow yourself to be treated

Holy Quran ۲۹ : ۶۹

And (as for) those who strive hard for Us , We will most certainly guide them in Our . ways; Allah (swt) is most surely with the doers of good

JAMES / JAMAL LUTFI

I was raised in a Mormon family (my father was a Bishop) but also attended a Pentecostal Church . I converted to Islam about two years ago . My parents converted to Mormonism (LDS Church) when I was only ۳ and so it was the only religion I knew up until I was a teenager . I lived in Central Florida (Bible Belt) where there was little tolerance for Mormons , much less Muslims . I really tried to get a grip on the Mormon faith . I went on Temple trips to do the baptisms for the dead , I read the Book of Mormon , I prayed , etc . . . . However , I never received that testimony they always talked about . Sometimes I think we can convince ourselves of anything (gain a testimony) if we tell ourselves we want to believe something enough . I became so frustrated with teaching in the Mormon Church and nobody could answer my questions (why could African Americans not hold the priesthood until ۱۹۷۶ , why would God curse someone with darker skin , why could

Jesus create wine but we are forbidden to drink it , why could we not drink coca cola through my whole childhood and then when the Church gets stock in the company we can drink it and nothing is wrong) . I left the church with much heartache.

I used to go with my friend to his Catholic Church but that made no sense to me at all.

The first time I heard of Islam from a Muslim was when I was in the Army training as a radio repair technician . While training we had a soldier from the Jordanian Army training with us , I believe his name was Sergeant Mutasum . I thought Islam was somewhat like Hinduism so I questioned him about how many gods he believed in and what he thought of Jesus (peace be upon him) . I was really shocked when I found his beliefs were not all that different from mine except he believed in a Prophet named Muhammad (peace be upon him) . I lost track of the Sergeant after the school ended and never thought much of Islam after that day . While in the Army I attended a small Pentecostal Church a few times and thought I would give it a go when I got out.

After leaving the Army I met some people that were Pentecostal and decided to join the �mainstream� Christian community . The people seemed really friendly and well intentioned . After about a year of going there I began

to question again . Why were these people so caught up in emotion with no theological study ? How could Jesus be God and make claims against it ? What was this speaking in tongues nonsense , the people did not understand what they were saying ? I felt there was more to the religion that Jesus left but I didn�t know where . to find it . I quit the Pentecostal Church and went back to Mormonism

Later in my life I travelled to Ogden , Utah to go to Weber State University . I wanted to give the Mormon Church another try . I signed up for religious classes at the LDS institute . I was not on a pilgrimage to get a theological degree but I wanted to be in the Mormon stronghold where I was not a minority . I really liked going to college and started going to Church regularly . While there I met a woman in an institute class . After one year of school and a stronger belief in the Mormon faith I decided to get married and it was sealed in the Salt Lake City temple . Everything was perfect , or so I . thought

After a few weeks of marriage I began to feel those thoughts of doubt about the Mormon Church and what they taught . I tried to believe so hard but it is difficult when the teachings are so contrary to what I perceived God to be . Can a man become a

God ? Can a God become a man ? Can I create my own world one day ? etc . . . . My ex-wife and I got along perfectly except in the area of religion . Eventually , after ۴ years , we separated quite amicably and were better off . I felt that my lack of faith tore her down and I could not believe some of what I considered non-sense .

After my divorce I began searching the Internet for truth . I joined chat rooms on religion and joined in discussion boards . I met some Muslims and was fascinated . The beliefs they held were so close to mine . I did not believe Jesus was God , I believed Jesus was more than a normal man (a Messenger) . After talking online I wanted to go meet some real Muslims so I went to a Mosque in Tempe , Arizona (next to Phoenix) . While there I met a group of American Converts that were doing Dawah (basically telling people about Islam) . They were just getting ready to leave when I walked in and told them I wanted to learn more about Islam . I told them where I stood and that I already believed much of what they did . After a long discussion and a study from the Quran and Bible I came to conclusion that I was a Muslim at heart , it was my parents that has raised me with those beliefs contrary to Islam

I told them I wanted to take my Shahadah (declaration of faith) and I embraced . Islam that day . Imagine my surprise when the first time for Jummah came (Friday , the congregational day for Muslims to gather) and the Imam (leader) announced my conversion to Islam . I had hundreds of people giving me their phone numbers , hugging me , and accepting me as their brother . That brother hood and my faith have not wavered to this day . Anytime I have a question it is answered and that is the . beauty of Islam

Holy Quran ٣٩ : ١٨

Those who listen to the word , then follow the best of it; those are they whom Allah . (swt) has guided , and those it is who are the men of understanding

WHEN I FOUND ISLAM I KNEW IT WAS THE LAST STOP

part ١

In the Name of Allah , The Beneficent , The Merciful

Often when people ask me �How did you come to Islam ? � , I take a deep breath and try and tell them the �short version� . I don�t think that Islam is something that I came to suddenly , even though it felt like it at the time , but it was something that I was gradually guided towards through different experiences . Through writing this piece I hope that somebody may read it , identify with some things and may be . prompted to learn more about the real Islam

I was born in ١٩٧٨ in Australia , was christened and raised �Christian� . As a child I

used to look forward to attending church and going to Sunday school . Even though I can still remember looking forward to it , I can�t remember much about it . Maybe it was getting all dressed up in my best clothes , maybe seeing the other children , maybe the stories , or maybe it was just that I could look forward to my grandmothers� famous Sunday lunch when I got home . My family wasn�t strict about religion at all – the bible was never read outside church from what I knew , grace was never said before eating . To put it simply I guess religion just wasn�t a major issue in our lives . I can remember attending church with my family sometimes , and as I got older I can remember getting annoyed when the other members of my . family chose not to come . So for the last couple of years I attended church alone

At the time that I attended primary school �Religious Education� was a lesson that was given weekly . We learned of �true Christian values� and received copies of the bible . While I wouldn�t admit it at the time , I also looked forward to those classes . It was something interesting to learn about , something that I believed had some sort . of importance , just that I didn�t know what

In my high school years I attended an all girls high school . We didn�t have any sort of religious classes there

and I guess to some degree I missed that because I starting reading the bible in my , own time . At the time I was reading it for �interest sake� . I believed that God existed , but not in the form that was often described in church . As for the trinity , I hoped that maybe that was something I would come to understand as I grew older . There were many things that confused me , hence there seemed to be �religious� times in my life where I would read the bible and do my best to follow it , then I would get confused and think that it was all too much for me to understand . I remember talking to a Christian girl in my math classes . I guess that gave me one reason to look forward to math . I would ask her about things that I didn�t understand , and whilst some explanations I could understand , others didn�t seem to be logical enough for . me to trust in Christianity ١٠٠٪

I can�t say that I have ever been comfortable living with a lot of aspects of the Australian culture . I didn�t understand for example drinking alcohol or having multiple boyfriends . I always felt that there was a lot of pressure and sometimes cried at the thought of �growing up� because of what �growing up� meant in this culture . My family travelled overseas fairly often and I always thought that through travelling I

might be able to find a country where I could lead a comfortable life and not feel pressured like I did . After spending ٣ weeks in Japan on a student exchange I decided that I wanted to go again for a long-term exchange . In my final year of high school I was accepted to attend a high school in Japan for the following year .

Before I left Australia to spend the year overseas I was going through one of my �religious stages� . I often tried to hide these stages from my parents . For some reason I thought that they would laugh at me reading the bible . The night before I flew to Japan my suitcase was packed however I stayed up until my parents had gone to sleep so I could get the bible and pack it too . I didn�t want my parents to know I was taking it .

My year in Japan didn�t end up the most enjoyable experience in my life by any means . I encountered problem after problem . At the time it was difficult . I was ١٧ years old when I went there and I learned a lot of valuable lessons in that year . One of which was �things aren�t always what they seem� . At one stage I felt as though I had lost everything - my Japanese school friends (friends had always been very important to me , even in Australia) , my Japanese families , then I received a

phone call saying that I was to be sent home to Australia a couple of months early . I had �lost everything� – including the dream that I had held so close for so many years . The night that I received that phone call I got out my bible . I thought that maybe I could find some comfort in it , and I knew that no matter what , God knew the truth about everything that everybody does and that no amount of gossip and lies could change that . I had always believed that hard times were never given to us to �stop us� , but to help us grow . With that in mind , I was determined to stay in Japan for the whole year and somehow try and stop the ridiculous rumours . .Alhamdulillah I was able to do that

From that year I came to understand that not only is every culture different , but also they both have good points and bad points . I came to understand that it wasn�t a .culture that I was searching for . . . but something else

I attended an all girls Buddhist school in Japan . We had a gathering each week where we prayed , sang songs and listened to the principal give us lengthy talks . At first I wasn�t comfortable attending these gatherings . I was given a copy of the songbook .along with the beads that you put over your hands when you pray

I tried to get out of going to them at the start , but then decided that I didn�t have to place the same meaning to things as others did . When I prayed , I prayed to the same God that I had always prayed to – the One and Only God . I can�t say that I really understand Buddhism . Whenever I tried to find out more I met with dead ends . I even asked a Japanese man who taught English . He had often been to America and he said that in Japan he was Buddhist , and in American he was Christian . There were some things about Buddhism that I found interesting , but it wasn�t something that I . could consider a religion

In a lot of ways I picked what I liked out of religions and spiritual philosophies and formed what I considered to be my �Own Religion� . I collected philosophical quote after quote in high school , read into things such as the Celestine Prophecy and Angels when I returned to Australia , and still held onto the Christian beliefs that made sense . to me . I felt like I was continually searching for the truth

part ۲

When I returned to Australia from Japan I had grown closer to a girl that I went to high school with . She was always somebody who I considered to be a good friend , but wasn�t in �my group of friends� whom I sat with in class

or for lunch . Some of the people in that group I haven�t heard from and haven�t seen since I returned . I realised that this other girl and I had a lot more in common than I had first thought . Maybe this was because I had changed a lot in Japan , or maybe it was because I had learned that being �socially acceptable� and popular wasn�t important because the people that are making those judgements are not always morally correct . I didn�t really care who was my friend and who wasn�t anymore , but I did care that I was true to myself and refused to change to suit other people . I felt like I had found who I really was by losing everything that I had previously considered important.

The girl that I had grown closer to was Muslim , not that I thought of it at the time . One night we sat in McDonalds , taking advantage of their �free refill coffee� offer and talked about religion , mainly in what way we believed in God . She was the one asking the questions mostly , about how I thought God to �be� . I enjoyed the discussion and felt somehow that I might be making some sense to her with my �Own Religion� . When we got home she got out the ۴۰ Hadith Qudsi and read them for herself . She read some of them to me , which of course got me interested.

I asked to borrow the book from her so I could sit and read them all too , which I did . Reading the book in some ways was frightening . To me , examples of Islam could be found in TV news reports and in books such as �Princess� and �Not without my daughter� . Surely , I thought , the Hadith were just a good part of it , but the bad . part was there too

From there I moved back to my university for the start of semester and couldn�t really get books from my friend anymore so I started looking on the Internet . I had already �met� some Muslims on the IRC but I considered them my friends too and that they wouldn�t tell me the �truth� about Islam . I thought that they would only tell me the good parts . I did ask them some questions though and Masha�Allah they were a great help . I still remember asking a Muslim guy whether he believed in angels . Angels were a part of my �Own Religion� and I certainly didn�t believe that a Muslim guy would admit to believing in the existence of Angels ! ! My limited and ignorant understanding of a Muslim male was one who beat his wife , killed female babies and was a terrorist in his spare time . This sort of person couldn�t possibly believe in angels I thought . Of course I was shocked when he said �Of course I believe

. in angels� . From then I was interested to know what else Muslims believed in

I often think that I initially continued reading about Islam through the Internet to prove it wrong . I was always looking for that �bad part� . Everybody couldn�t have such a bad view of Islam if there was no reason for them to . I had always found a bad or an illogical part to every religion that I had read into . So why would Islam be different ? I remember finding an Islamic chat site for the first time and expected to see suppressed females just reading what the males were saying . I expected them not to have an opinion , I expected the �typical Muslim girl� that I had always felt sorry for . To my shock I saw girls happily chatting , with opinions that they were . allowed to express . Muslim girls that were somehow more liberated than I felt

My learning about Islam through the Internet continued through chatting to lots of people and printing out homepage after homepage . The more I learned the more scared I was . I didn�t tell any of my friends that I was reading about Islam , not even my best friend . At first it was because I didn�t want them telling me only the �good parts� , and then even when I came to realise that I wasn�t going to find any of the bad parts , I didn�t want them to get

their hopes up about me reverting to Islam . I wanted this �decision� to be one that . I made on my own – without pressure

This �decision� that I refer to wasn�t really a decision at all . I am often asked �What made you decide to become Muslim ? � but when something as clear and logical as Islam is put in front of you , there is no choice . This is not to say that it made the decision to say Shahadah any easier . There were many things that stopped me at first . Firstly I didn�t think that I knew enough about Islam� but then it didn�t matter because I knew that I would never find anything that was illogical or �bad� . I came to realise that saying Shahadah is not the final step , but the first . Insha-Allah throughout my life I will continue to learn . The other thing that made me hesitant was turning the meaning of the word �Islam� from all the bad things that I had linked with it . I always thought that I couldn�t possibly be Muslim ! ! To then learn that my �Own Religion� and beliefs for example of God being One , was actually Islam was hard at first . Islam brought everything together . Everything made sense . To me , finding Islam was like one big bus ride – I had stopped and had a look at all of the stops along the way , taken

a bit from all of them , and continued on with the journey . When I found Islam I knew . it was the �last stop� of my long ride

In October of ١٩٩٧ , my best friend came with me for me to say my Shahadah at an Islamic Centre in Melbourne (Jeffcott st) . I was still scared at the time , but after one of the sisters going through the articles of faith , and me putting a mental tick next to each of them , I knew that there was nothing left to do but to say it with my mouth . I still cry when I think of the moment that I said �Yes . . I�ll do it� . I finally dropped the mental wall that had been stopping me . I was to repeat in Arabic after the sister . With her first word I cried . It is a feeling that I can�t explain . My friend was sitting beside but a little behind me , I didn�t realise it then but she was already crying . I felt . so much power around me and in the words , but I myself felt so weak

Sometimes I think my family wonder if this is a phase I am going through , just like my other phases . I was even vegetarian until mum told me what was for dinner that night – a roast . There is still so much for me to learn , but one thing

that I would like people to understand is that I know Alhamdulillah that Islam is a blessing for mankind . The more you learn , Insha-Allah , the more beauty you will see . in Islam

. Your sister in Islam

Holy Quran ۴۵ : ۲۰

These are clear proofs for men , and a guidance and a mercy for a people who are . sure

SAABIRAH ABDULHAYY

part ۱

Each single life is a unique , beautiful , gift from the One Who Creates . Insha�Llah , I shall never stop loving to sing the praises of my Creator (swt) and the Road that I�ve travelled and continue to travel until breath leaves this body . I was born Muslim , AlHumduli�Llah although I never knew that as I was raised Catholic Christian . There have been many trials with only one answer even when I didn�t know the question . There has been One Constant in my life and it is the Source of All . . . Allah (swt) . Sometimes , that never-ending , �God , where are you ? � caused difficulties , especially when I was growing up . Mother used to say (and still does) �Go to church once a week , say your prayers and then cut it out with all of your �God Stuff ! � For me , that would have been like cutting off a limb . I have been a bit ill since ۱۲ years old in that I�ve had epilepsy , which was difficult to control . I was

married at age ٢٢ , had a child , and because of seizures , I was heavily medicated and seem to have lost ١١ years of my life/memories . I recall my daughter at the age of ٥ and then . . . she was ١۶ . I became ill with pneumonia and in one day my lungs collapsed , liver failed and I slipped into a comatose state . The doctors resuscitated me and used life support for sustenance . My family was told that I would most likely live for not more than ٣ days . AlHumduli�Llah , I didn�t know that I was �supposed !to die� and one day I woke up

My life took a turn . I worked as an office manager for a few years . When I was laid off , I went on retreat to seek Guidance and again asked God , �Where are You ? � The official reason for the retreat was a passage from the Bible : �Ask and you shall receive; seek and you shall find; knock and the door will be opened to you� . When I left for that retreat , I made a �bargain with God . � I asked for His Guidance and in turn promised that after ١٠ days of prayer , I would return home to find God�s Will for me �in the mailbox ! � Well , Allah (swt) came through and I found one letter about a pilgrimage to Israel . In Israel , I

discovered Arabs and Muslims . �The Road Less Travelled� opened up to me and I was happy to walk it . After that first ١٠-day pilgrimage I returned to Israel by myself for what I believed would be ٢٨ days for a time of prayer , searching , and coming to a better understanding of God and me . When the airplane landed I walked through Ben Gurion airport pushing my luggage in a trolley , wondering what would happen to me . . . alone in the Middle East ! A very beautiful world opened up to me as I looked out at the desert , palm trees and people speaking strange languages . . . Hebrew and Arabic . , neither of which I understood at all

The trip from Ben Gurion Airport to Jerusalem was my very first experience of being totally on my own . The brilliant blue skies and gentle breezes spelled out �home� to me . After one day in Jerusalem I was off to Mt . Tabor for ١١ days . My ٤٠th birthday was on the exact same day as the ٥٠th anniversary of the ordination of one of the Franciscan friars and the banquet and fireworks that were planned for that day were for us both ! Looking out over the desert and across to Mt . Hermon was my morning activity . The sheep and goats with their bells meandered up the side of Mt . Tabor . Birds tweeted and sang their morning songs as

the sun rose . It was summer and everything was in bloom . Flower petals marked the pages of my prayer books and journals instead of bookmarks . I cannot properly explain what it was and what was going on in me , but again , I felt as though . �something� was calling

After Mt . Tabor and the Church of the Transfiguration , I went down to Mt . Carmel . Ahh . . . the Mediterranean filling the horizon with such a blue/green ! I lived in the Monastery of St . Terese with the Carmelite Sisters and Friars . I was a secular Discalced Carmelite at the time . It was our obligation to pray five times every day the �Liturgy of the Hours , � which is mainly the Psalms and a ritual standing and bowing . . . much like making Salaat . So , we rose with the sun . I wondered at the marvels and questions that were filling every piece of me . I was there for the feasts of Our Lady of Mt . Carmel and ٣ days later , the feast of St . Elijah . The cave of Elijah is in the side of the mount overlooking the ocean . Jews and Muslims came for a week camping out in the huge yard in front of the monastery . Every year there is a great celebration for the Feast of Elijah the Prophet who fought the people of Baal , right there on Mt

Carmel . The Temple of Baal is still there almost next door to the Carmelite . Monastery . The time on Mt . Carmel was like a dream and when my two weeks there was up I didn�t know what to do . I called to the US and they said , �You sound as though you want to stay , why don�t you change your ticket ? � Well , they didn�t !have to say it twice

Going to Jerusalem was scary . I didn�t know the city and I�d yet to find my way around the small alleyways of the Old City (Al-Quds) . There was a favourite spot at the coffee shop at the Notre Dame Center . I�d sit there and look out over the Old City�s minarets and steeples . The Dome of the Rock filled my gaze . . . so beautiful ! After the ۴ days that were reserved for me in the hotel I had to �hit the streets� in search of a new place to lay my head . The winding alleyways of al-Quds were like a labyrinth . I knew of one little house that was run by the Arab Rosary Sisters and went there pulling all of my belongings . The little Arab Sister said , �Sorry , we don�t have any room but you can leave your luggage while you go to look around the city . � So , I was off on the very old stone streets with the wall of

al-Quds always on one side of me . As darkness began to fall and there was nowhere to sleep I recalled the words of the Psalm , �Though an army surround me , I shall not fear for Thou art with me . � I had lost my luggage and couldn�t find my way back to the morning�s house ! Trudging down the dusty street I saw a familiar door built into the walls . It was strange in that it was open with night approaching . An Arab nun looked out as I was about to pass by and said , �Aren�t you Sabina ? Someone told me that you were here in the morning . Come in , we have a place for you ! � What a shock ! Thus began the next months of communal meals with other travellers (who turned into �Jerusalem friends� over the next ٧ years) , hand washing clothes and singing as we hung them on the roof to dry , bargaining in the souq , and travelling . the city in an attempt to soak in it�s glory

My roommate Lena was Swedish . She worked at the Gaza Community Mental Health Program on weekends and was studying Arabic . That was where I learned of the plight of the Palestinians and first decided to plunge myself into the Arabic language . When my Visa ran out it was a teary �goodbye� and long flight back to the US . After a little while , I found

myself back in al-Quds . . . my home . Money was tight so it was time to live life poorly in my beloved al-Quds . I learned every face , every smile , every shop�s owner and the merchants in the souq . I was known as �the woman with the beautiful dress� for the lovely Bedouin jalabiyya that I wore . Also , I was known as �the hard woman� because I�d learned to �bargain with the best of them ! � I lived in a hostel (٥٠ cents a night) and met Ismael who would become my teacher for writing Arabic . I didn�t know it at the time but the words that Ismael was teaching me to write were things like �ism� or �Malik� �al-ard . � He said , �Sabina , the best way to learn the Arabic language is with the Qur�an . �

I didn�t know what the Qur�an was ! I had very little exposure to Islam . Ismael always said , �Sabina your Faith is beautiful and you love God . Don�t let anyone hurt that . . . only God is One . � �Do not forget Sabina . . . God is One . �

part ٢

Things changed a bit . I was living inside the Walls of the Old City . My little room looked like a cave made from stone with a vaulted roof . Winters were freezing cold and wet . Spring cloaked the country in colors , summer was sweltering hot ,

and the fall was a less colorful version of spring . One year , a Carmelite priest that I knew took me to the Monastery of the Discalced Carmelite nuns on the Mount of Olives just there at the Grotto of the Pater Noster . I was already a member of a Catholic Discalced Carmelite community but thought to enter the monastery in Palestine/Israel . Life in the monastery was beautiful . The olive grove just out the window of my cell was huge with olive trees , grape vines , pomegranate bushes , fig trees , plum trees and a vegetable garden . Life was lived around the bells . We prayed every day , ٥ times a day , and in the summer we prayed at the same times that the Adhan was calling Muslims to prayer . That was a very prayerful , solitary and thoughtful life . It afforded me much peace and lots of time for quiet thought . While in the monastery I wondered about God . I was overshadowed by a different and powerful Transcendence . . . I thought , �Where is God ? � Now I know that He (swt) never left me for even a split second , Masha�Llah . Life in the monastery was typical of any other nun but I sensed there that my life needed to be out on the streets in the world . When I left the monastery it was a sad day but also the first day of the

rest of my life . I went down to Jerusalem on Yom Kippur . After a short visit back to � . the US , I returned to al-Quds again . . . �for the rest of my life

The last stage of life in al-Quds I worked at the Syrian Catholic Patriarchate in East Jerusalem�s Muslim neighbourhood . The Syrian/Arab Christians are very suspicious of Muslims and I was told to make sure that all doors and windows were securely locked by nightfall because �they (Muslim neighbours) will sneak in and cut our throats while we sleep ! � At that time I was working very hard doing manual work . I was the �foolish American� since I was not in the least afraid of Muslims; they were my friends . I was the one who cared for the Muslim women and children that came to our guesthouse . I also cleaned lots of bathrooms in the house , washed floors , and scrubbed the endless stairs on my hands and knees at least once a week In all there were ۱۶ flights of stairs . I must have hung goodness knows how many sheets on the rooftop every morning . I liked going up on the roof just after waking to pray . Every morning at about ۴ : ۳۰ I went up to the roof and looked out over the Old City . My ! beloved Jerusalem ! The Dome of the Rock is a sight that will live in my heart forever

. I had been learning to write Arabic and copied everything that I saw

One day I saw something on the wall of a coffee shop and it captivated me . I copied it . It was so beautiful that my fingers learned to write it without stopping at all . Every morning I used the tip of my finger to �write� the words in the blue sky . Soon , I asked Muslim friends what it was that I was writing and they told me , �That is a Surah , Surat al-Falaq . � A dear friend , Kamil , suggested that I go down into the . souq and get a copy of the Qur�an , so I did

The first thing that I looked for was Al-Falaq , and I read , �In the Name of God , the Merciful , the Compassionate . All of Creation seeks refuge in the Lord of the Daybreak� . . . just as I had been writing with my finger in the sky ! �From the evil which He has created� . . . and I thought of the soldiers that patrolled Jerusalem . �And from the evil of the darkness when it descends� . . . was this my Muslim friends who would �sneak in and slit our throats� ? ! the riots in the streets and the sounds of the dark . �And from the evil of those who practice witchcraft , and from . . �the evil of the envier when he envies

the envious . . . what did I have to envy ? Little did I know of the Gifts that Allah (swt) . . was showering on little me

The days were beautiful after the work was done but because of the harsh chemicals that I had to use my feet and hands were callused and raw . The dry skin finally cracked leaving my hands bleeding when used very much . If I stood still in one place for too long my feet would become numb so that when beginning to walk it was agony . Sandals were permanently bloodstained from walking and irritating the cracks . I noticed that shop owners and produce vendors were avoiding me . I looked like a leper and a darned skinny one at that . The only thing that helped forget the pain was to look at the children and walk the narrow streets of the souq . . . up to the top of the Mt . of Olives . . . out to Ein Karim to sit up on the cliff overlooking the wadi . . . Nazareth and the Galilee ! Tiberius and a boat trip across the Sea of Galilee to the Mount of Beatitudes ! The Dead Sea where I went to swim . Gorgeous ! Well . . . life was tough and life was beautiful . After going to Mass every evening I walked home to the . patriarchate down the same dusty roads

One evening as I walked in excruciating pain

I talked to God . �My God , are You there ? Do You really exist ? I don�t know if I�m a Jew , Christian or Muslim or Atheist ! My God . . . if You are there , I�m throwing everything that I�ve ever knew of You right here in this gutter . You have to teach me because I sense something but don�t know what it is ! � With that I looked up at the sun setting over the golden Dome of the Rock . . . ah , Ya Allah ! As I walked home I cried . It felt as though I had just attempted spiritual suicide and was falling off of the top of a cliff into a black abyss . I could feel myself �dropping� and knew that I would either land in the pits of Hell or . . . or . . . God could save me ! My thoughts were that God is One . . . He transcends whatever anyone I�d heard had said . �Please .God , Ya Allah take me ! � was all that I could think

After that I became ill . The Syrian Catholics were �not nice . � One day I was told to leave by afternoon . . . no more work . By evening I was back on the street pulling some luggage with me , some stored at a little house in the courtyard , and nowhere to sleep . Eventually I found

a room in a hostel in East Jerusalem . After a few weeks my body froze up due to the lupus condition . The American Embassy made emergency arrangements to fly me back to the US to find some doctors . It was probably the saddest thing that could have happened . Just before I left I went back to the Notre Dame and had my usual cappuccino on the terrace with its beautiful view of the City . Sitting there I knew that it was a brief period that I would remember for the rest of my life . I looked out over the City at the Dome of the Rock with the Mt . of Olives rising behind it and prayed , �My God�Please do not let me die until I once again see al-Quds . My God , let Jerusalem live always in my heart . � I have never taken a photograph of al-Quds yet . I can see it still

When I returned to the US , after a while of being sick and unable to move , I got better , went to work and continued bumping up against the thoughts and feelings of Jerusalem . God was there in my life . . . and God was One , Al Quyyoom , the Transcendent . I missed hearing the Adhans echoing in the streets of Jerusalem . . . �Allahu Akbar�Allahu Akbar . � I missed the little children running to me calling , � ! �Sabria , Sabria

� ? I missed my Muslim friends and I wondered , �Where is Allah

One morning just before work I was compelled to stand in my kitchen and asked Allah to be my witness as I said , �AshHadu ana La Illaha Illa Allah wa AshaHadu ana Muhammad Nabi waRasuulu . � I read al-Fatiha and al-Falaq and walked out my door in tears , overjoyed at the thought �I am Muslim ! Allahu Akbar ! My name had . changed from Sabina or Sabria to Saabirah . . . the Patient one . Subhan Allah

. Salaamu Alaikum waRahmatulluh waBarakatuhu

Holy Quran ۴۸ : ۲۸

He it is Who sent His Apostle with the guidance and the true religion that He may . make it prevail over all the religions; and Allah (swt) is enough for a witness

DR . KARI ANN OWEN , PH . D . / SISTER PENOMEE

. A salaam aleikum , beloved family

� . There is no god but Allah , and Muhammed is his messenger�

. These are the words of the Shahadah oath , I believe

The Creator is known by many names . His wisdom is always recognizable , and his presence made manifest in the love , tolerance and compassion present in our . community

His profound ability to guide us from a war-like individualism so rampant in American society to a belief in the glory and dignity of the Creator�s human family , and our obligations to and membership within that family . This describes the maturation of a spiritual personality , and perhaps the most desirable maturation of the psychological self , also

.

My road to Shahadah began when an admired director , Tony Richardson , died of AIDS . Mr . Richardson director was already a brilliant and internationally recognized professional when I almost met him backstage at the play �Luther� at age ۱۴ .

Play writing for me has always been a way of finding degrees of spiritual and emotional reconciliation both within myself and between myself and a world I found rather brutal due to childhood circumstances . Instead of fighting with the world , I let my conflicts fight it out in my plays . Amazingly , some of us have even grown up together !

So as I began accumulating stage credits (productions and staged readings) , beginning at age ۱۷ , I always retained the hope that I would someday fulfil my childhood dream of studying and working with Mr . Richardson . When he followed his homosexuality to America (from England) and a promiscuous community , AIDS killed him , and with him went another portion of my sense of belonging to and within American society . American and Western society to Islamic culture for moral guidance .

Why Islam and not somewhere else ?

My birthmother�s ancestors were Spanish Jews who lived among Muslims until the Inquisition expelled the Jewish community in ۱۴۹۲ . In my historical memory , which I feel at a deep level , the call of the muezzin is as deep as the lull of the ocean and the swaying of ships , the pounding of horses� hooves across the

. desert , the assertion of love in the face of oppression

I felt the birth of a story within me , and the drama took form as I began to learn of an Ottoman caliph�s humanity toward Jewish refugees at the time of my ancestors� expulsions . Allah guided my learning , and I was taught about Islam by figures as diverse as Imam Siddiqi of the South Bay Islamic Association; Sister Hussein of Rahima; and my beloved adopted Sister , Maria Abdin , who is Native American and . Muslim and a writer for the SBIA magazine , IQRA

My first research interview was in a halal butcher shop in San Francisco�s Mission District , where my understanding of living Islam was profoundly affected by the first Muslim lady I had ever met : a customer who was in hijab , behaved with a sweet . kindness and grace and also read , wrote and spoke four languages

Her brilliance , coupled with her amazing (to me) freedom from arrogance , had a profound effect on the beginnings of my knowledge of how Islam can affect human . behaviour

. Little did I know then that not only would a play be born , but a new Muslim

The course of my research introduced me to much more about Islam than a set of facts , for Islam is a living religion . I learned how Muslims conduct themselves with a dignity and kindness , which lifts them above the American slave market of sexual competition and violence

I learned that Muslim men and women could actually be in each other�s presence . without tearing each other to pieces , verbally and physically . And I learned that modest dress , perceived as a spiritual state , could uplift human behaviour and grant . to both men and women a sense of their own spiritual worth

? Why did this seem so astonishing , and so astonishingly new

Like most American females , I grew up in a slave market , comprised not only of the sexual sicknesses of my family , but the constant negative judging of my appearance by peers beginning at ages younger than seven . I was taught from a very early age by American society that my human worth consisted solely of my attractiveness (or , in my case , lack of it) to others . Needless to say , in this atmosphere , boys and girls , men and women , often grew to resent each other very deeply , given the desperate desire for peer acceptance , which seemed almost if not totally dependent not on one�s kindness or compassion or even intelligence , but on looks and the perception . of those looks by others

While I do not expect or look for human perfection among Muslims , the social . differences are profound , and almost unbelievable to someone like myself

I do not pretend to have any answers to the conflicts of the Middle East , except what the prophets , beloved in Islam , have already

expressed . My disabilities prevent me from fasting , and from praying in the same prayer postures as most of you . At this time I dress modestly for an American woman . , which is still not hijab

But I love and respect the Islam I have come to know through the behaviour and words of the men and women I have come to know in AMILA and elsewhere , where I . find a freedom from cruel emotional conflicts and a sense of imminent spirituality

? What else do I feel and believe about Islam

I support and deeply admire Islam�s respect for same sex education; for the rights of women as well as men in society; for modest dress; and above all for sobriety and marriage , the two most profound foundations of my life , for I am ٢١ ١/٢ years sober and happily married . How wonderful to feel that one and half billion Muslims share my faith in the character development marriage allows us , and also in my decision to . remain drug- and alcohol-free

? What , then , is Islam�s greatest gift in a larger sense

In a society which presents us with constant pressure to immolate ourselves on the altars of unbridled instinct without respect for consequences , Islam asks us to regard ourselves as human persons created by Allah with the capacity for responsibility in our relations with others . Through prayer and charity and a commitment to sobriety and education , if we follow the path of Islam

we stand a good chance of raising children who will be free from the violence and , exploitation which is robbing parents and children of safe schools and . neighbourhoods , and often of their lives

The support of the AMILA community and other friends , particularly at a time of some strife on the AMILA Net , causes me to affirm my original responses to Islam and declare that this is a marvellous community , for in its affirmation of Allah�s gifts of marriage , sobriety and other forms of responsibility , Islam shows us the way out of . hell

My husband , Silas , and I are grateful for your presence and your friendship . And as we prepare to lay the groundwork for adoption , we hope that we will continue to be blessed with your warm acceptance , for we want our child to feel the spiritual presence of Allah in the behaviour of surrounding adults and children . We hope that as other AMILA�ers consider becoming new parents , and become new parents , a progressive Islamic school might emerge . . . progressive meaning supportive and . loving as well as superior in academics , arts and sports

Maybe our computer whizzes will teach science and math while I teach creative ! writing and horseback riding

Please consider us companions on the journey toward heaven , and please continue to look for us at your gatherings , on the AMILA net and in the colors and dreams of . the sunset

For there

is no god but Allah , the Creator , and Muhammed , whose caring for the victims of war . and violence still brings tears from me , is his Prophet

, A salaam aleikum

Holy Quran ۵۳ : ۲۳

They are naught but names which you have named , you and your fathers; Allah has not sent for them any authority . They follow naught but conjecture and the low desires which (their) souls incline to; and certainly the guidance has come to them . from their Lord

SISTER JAN JACKSON

. This is the story of my conversion to Islam

Before I begin , let me say that I don�t believe my story is particularly special , in that there are many stories like it . However , as I believe that God wrought a miracle in my . life (as He has in many others) then of course it IS special

I guess there are two ways to tell my story . You could say : �I met a man who introduced me to Islam . I converted , and we married . � But that is a gross . simplification

�You could also say it this way

I am a ۴۸ year old Australian . I was raised a Catholic and am still grateful for the religious upbringing my parents gave me . They were practising Catholics who imparted their faith to me and I attended a Catholic school . From this education I did gain a �version� of God and a �kind of� spiritual sense , but these were both

so vague and inaccessible as to never touch my heart . The doctrine of Christianity never really sat comfortably with me . It was like a coat that doesn�t fit . I wore it but it never felt right and by the time I was about ٢٠ , I was happier taking the coat off . Sadly , I didn�t wear a coat at all for the next ٢٥ years.

During that time I lived a comfortable , privileged life , in the �western lifestyle� sense � financially secure , educated and trained , healthy , with no major crises in my life . I married . I worked . I travelled . I indulged myself . Food , wine , entertainment , weekends away , fancy hotels , overseas trips . Eat , drink and be merry . Having no children , I had no real responsibilities . I sought mainly to entertain myself , and have a good time.

From where I am standing now , that period just seems like a life without purpose , and it�s truly painful for me to look back and see ٢٥ years of a Godless life.

Then , about five years ago , God gave me the opportunity to reassess my life , alhamdulillah . My personal circumstances changed drastically . My beloved father died tragically , my marriage broke up painfully , my income was significantly reduced and I was living alone . I was forced to take stock , reflect and reassess my life

. And I found myself in a thoroughly meaningless void .

Around this time I began to read all kinds of material on all kinds of religions . I tried to revive my Catholicism , but it was useless . It did not feel real or sincere . I felt no . sense of connection

At this time I met , and had a very important conversation with , a Muslim brother , my neighbour who later became my husband . At this time I knew absolutely nothing about Islam . All my reading (on Christianity , Judaism , Buddhism , Sikhism , etc) seemed to have taken me down every path EXCEPT Islam . So when I asked him about HIS religion he said : �It is a beautiful religion , a simple religion , part of life . � His quiet , composed , assured conviction struck me . Here was someone who was so quietly certain about his religion that it needed nothing more than these simple few words to provide an answer , an answer that seemed whole and complete . And here was someone who described his religion as �beautiful� . I had never encountered this before . Religion had always been a duty , or an institution , something to be learned or endured , something burdensome and complicated and problematic � not something �beautiful� . It struck my heart in a way I do not really understand . But I have to say that it was one of those defining

. moments of one�s life � something irreversible happened

So then it began . I decided to try and learn about Islam . I asked around , tentatively at first�� I bought books and read , I browsed websites , and I started to scan my environment for anything Islamic � not difficult living in Brunswick , Melbourne . I went to an information day at Preston mosque . I obtained a copy of the Qur�an from a book sale at the Islamic Council of Victoria . The more I read the Qur�an the more I became convinced of the truth of the Qur�anic revelations . I read books on the life of the Prophet (Peace be upon him) and became convinced that he was the last in a line of prophets before him , and a true messenger of Allah . I tried fasting in Ramadan and saw it as a real test of whether or not I meant business . But the experience strengthened my intent . I discovered for myself the benefits , and I felt . one with the brotherhood and sisterhood of all fasting Muslims around the world

But the most powerful experience for me at this time was discovering the act of prayer . I bought a book which taught me how to pray� . . and I have to say that from the moment I first bowed in prayer in the Muslim way , I felt connected to my Creator , for the first time in my life , and

. I wept with joy

I�ve heard many new Muslims say what I�m about to say but it was so true for me . From the time I opened my mind to the possibility of becoming a Muslim , I kept encountering things that spurred me on . And it was as if they were put there especially for me . And one thing would lead to another . A newspaper article might lead to a website . A chance encounter to a bookshop . A book to another book . A website to a conversation . This information gathering was such an important time . Because when I look back it was critical what I read and who I spoke to . I did not rely on my future husband to provide information . Quite the opposite . I was determined to separate my pursuit of Islam from him . I needed to be clear about my intentions – that I wasn�t pursuing Islam to please him or gain his approval . So I sought out other Muslims . One day I went to Friday prayer at Preston mosque . I was terrified . It took every bit of effort to get myself in that door . And there I met two sisters who were like angels planted there for me , who took me under their wings . I owe a great deal to them , and to every other Muslim I have met in the few years because all of them have inspired

. and supported me in the warmest and gentlest and most generous of ways

I said my shahada in Ramadan in December ١٩٩٩ , just before the new millennium . ticked over

Around this time I was introduced to the Revert Support Group , operating in Melbourne , which has been a great help and support to me , as a source of information and a sharing of knowledge and experience , and a way of meeting other . new Muslims

Increasingly I learned the value of prayer . I learned that to worship God regularly strengthens one�s commitment and sense of connection . It helps to set up an ongoing dialogue with God , a consciousness of God that starts to become more frequent , more natural , a remembering or mindfulness of God throughout your day . Prayer acts as a reminder that you are a part of God�s creation , and only a tiny part at that . You are reminded of your place in time and the universe . You cannot pray without feeling humility . It is impossible . I also learned that the frequency of prayer forces you to monitor your actions more closely , makes you more vigilant of your behaviour , and helps you to keep the concerns and preoccupations of everyday . routine in perspective

�(So why Islam over Christianity ? (as my Christian friends ask

Throughout my Christian upbringing , despite the emphasis on Jesus Christ , I never really conceptualised him as God . I thought of him as

an historical figure only , not a divine being . And I had great difficulty with the concept of the Holy Trinity . This concept for me obscured the path to God . On the other hand the concept of Tawheed in Islam , the oneness of God , is a concept that I can fully . embrace

For me Islam is a beautiful religion because it is simple and clear , and woven into the fabric of everyday life . For me , it is not bogged down in the doctrines and dogmas of other religious traditions . I was so impressed by the fact that to actually �become� a Muslim you need only believe it in your heart and make the declaration of faith � no . instructions , no indoctrinations , no sacraments , no initiations , no tests

Islam is full of ritual as we know � but I love the fact that the ritual is incorporated into simple acts of everyday life � in eating , washing , speaking , praying (not high �pomp and ceremony� ritual) . When I first started mixing with Muslims I loved to keep hearing the word �Allah� on everyone�s lips , and with no self-consciousness . You can go weeks , months , even years in a Christian community and never hear the word �God� mentioned ! Here�s a story that illustrates that . Around the time I first started to explore Islam I went with my mother to a Catholic function . It was an

informal forum with speakers and discussion , entitled �God in our society� . I listened for three hours and not once was the word �God� actually spoken ! except when a nun got up at the conclusion of the night to say �thank you to our speakers and thanks be to God� . This was the only time I heard the word and the evening was over . As everyone clapped , I wanted to shout �Wait . Aren�t you missing � !? something here

Another aspect of Islam that draws me to it is that Islam is a �bigger ask� , more demanding . By that I don�t just mean that it is more demanding in its discipline and its ritual , in its prayer and fasting and dietary requirements (abstinence from alcohol , . etc) . Rather I mean it is larger and more demanding in its focus , its vision , its scope

Personally speaking , I find the Christian message of love one another to be something of a �given� . It goes without saying that we should love one another . Whilst I would not wish to offend any Christian readers , or make a generalisation , but in my own experience I have found the Christian way of life today (increasingly) to be simply a kind of humanitarianism which allows the person to customize or tailorize their religion to suit themselves � love one another , don�t hurt anyone and do your own thing � and it seems to concentrate

on this life , narrow its focus to this earth and this existence . For me the Islamic message has quite a different emphasis , and is something way beyond this � it is attention to God � love your fellow man , of course , live as well as you can , of course � but use every bit of your limited capability to try and understand , comprehend , love and know and serve God . Islam demands that we focus on more than this life , . and beyond this life

I found this �bigger ask� in the Qur�an as well . For me the beauty of the Qur�an is the scope that it encompasses . It insists that we try and contemplate time and beyond , the universe and beyond , creation and beyond . It asks us to reflect on creation , the prophetic revelations , destiny , the beginning of life , the end of life and the day of judgement . In so doing , we try to grasp the hugeness of everything . beyond ourselves , the magnificence of God

I feel so happy and so blessed to have had my life transformed . In committing to the Islamic way I have found meaning and significance in everyday life , and a consequent peace that follows from this . And I feel I have experienced the miracle of seeing myself as part of creation and time and God�s plan , and the consequent joy . that follows from this

. I thank God . Alhamdulillah . And I praise Allah Subhanallah

Holy Quran ۵۶ : ۹۵

. Most surely this is a certain truth

SISTER HAYAM

I was Christian orthodox just ۴ years . I became Christian not because I believed in Jesus but because everybody was Christian around me . After I had gone to Italy where most of the people are Christian catholic I had big problem there and gone to die . When I was near death I prayed to Allah (swt) one month to safe my life and promised Allah (swt) that if he safe my life I will spend the rest of my life just for him . To worship him , to accept his will always and follow his way , to help people , and live just for him . That I wont have my own desires and wants and my desires and wants will be his will . I never prayed to Jesus when I was Christian . I prayed to God . After that Allah (swt) saved my life and little by little I became better Alhamdolillah . I began to search for the truth in religion , and I didn�t find that truth in Christianity orthodox . After I studied Christianity catholic and didn�t find the truth here also . After that I thought I will be always alone and will follow my own way different than the others . I searched for the truth and rules of Allah (swt) in my own life . I analysed every

situation and tried to get knowledge . Tried to feel what Allah (swt) wants from me and tried to follow his will . This period Allah (swt) gave me many tests and difficult situations , which I passed just because I listened to Allah (swt) . I don�t know if u will understand what I mean by �listen� . Its not voice but its feeling . It comes like knowledge without words and makes me understand what I have to do and where to go . It is this feeling that makes me understand the truth from lie and if I am right or . wrong , also I looked for signs in my life to show if my feeling is right or wrong

And alhamdolillah there were many signs that showed me my feeling is right and after that I saw I was really right . I found most of the rules in Islam by just analysing my life and listening to Allah (swt) and looking for his signs . First I found if something is wrong and after I found why it�s wrong . I mean first was feeling and after was the explanation . After that by chance I met Muslim man online who wanted to marry me . I tried to go to him but everything happened to stop me , so I was sure he is not the right man for me . (By the way it was funny that all men wanted to marry me and tried to come to

me always had something to stop them till I found my husband . He was the only one met me and I was sure he is the right man for me alhamdolilllah) . But this made me interested from Muslims and Islam , I began to talk to many Muslims . One night I gone to die again , this time the phone rang and it was my close friend from Saudia . I haven�t power to talk and when he felt I feel very bad he told me to listen to him , I haven�t choice anyway I haven�t power to talk , so he began recite something in Arabic , as he told me after it was Qur�an . When he finished I felt so good and I asked him what were that words who saved my life . He said it was Qur�an . I got strange feeling when he recited , like yellow light came in my heart and made me feel strong and calm . It�s made me interested to read Qur�an , I found Bulgarian translation of Qur�an (because I am Bulgarian by the way) and began to read . I was more than shocked when I found the same rules I already knew of God and much more I still didn�t know . When I tested the text with my heart if its truth I found this .is ١٠٠٪ truth

Before always when I read something I found there is truth but there are much not true things

too . I never read or heard before ١٠٠٪ truth . I thought there is not book or religion which is ١٠٠٪ true , but alhamdolillah I found Islam is that religion and Qur�an is that . book . So I decided to convert

Began reading online sites about Islam and found many good brothers and sisters helped me so much alhamdolillah . After I met my husband who is Muslim too . It was the last sign from Allah (swt) showed me I have to convert . So ٣ days before I married I gone with my husband to convert in Cairo . When I walked to the place to convert I felt like my power finished , like I will fall down and prayed in my mind to Allah (swt) if he wants me to be Muslim to give me power to go to convert . After I gone there and said shahada in front of the Sheikh , my husband and his brother , I saw something dark gone from me , was like black clothes , it wasn�t material but I could see like black smoke gone out from me . After that I felt like light is coming out of me , it was incredible . For just one minute I changed so much alhamdolillah . My husband told me that Allah (swt) forgave all my sins and I am clean like baby , when he said that I understood that the smoke I saw gone out from me were my

sins . (I didn�t know I have so much sins) So then I began to live like Muslim and learn . as much as I can about Islam

. My life became better alhamdolillah

Holy Quran ٦١ : ٩

He it is Who sent His Apostle with the guidance and the true religion , that He may . make it overcome the religions , all of them , though the polytheists may be averse

MY BODY STARTED TO TREMBLE WITH FEAR AND TEARS WERE FLOWING

Assalam Alaikum

I have been reading the stories of people converting to Islam for quite a while now and decided to tell everyone about my story . It is a bit different than others in fact I . was born in a Muslim family in the United Kingdom and have lived here all my life

My parents came to this country before I was born . I have three sisters and one brother . Even though I was born in a Muslim family none I knew were practising . All I knew was that I had a Muslim name , couldn�t eat pork and the white peoples meat , . and was not allowed to show my legs

I had a really disturbing childhood my father used to physically and mentally abuse my mother and all of us . He used to drink and have extra marital affairs . We were very afraid of him and could never talk to him freely . As growing up I lacked self- . confidence and was very shy because I used to be put down a lot by my father

When I

was about nine years old we went to Pakistan to live as my dad was afraid we didn�t speak their language i . e . Punjabi and were not familiar with the culture . We stayed there for five years I would say it was a good thing as we were taught reciting the Quran , praying salaat and we went to school which taught us about Islamic history . but still nothing that made an effect

We came back to England and things were a bit better than before my dad wasn�t as abusive . My sister wanted to marry a man but my father disapproved so she ran off to get married to him . I was aware of this and tried to talk her out of it but she had made her mind up . I also left on the same day and went to a hostel as I was afraid . what my father would do to me

I hated it , there were other Asian girls living there but I didn�t like the way they were . They had boyfriends and lived like white girls I cried for two days and decided to go home as I didn�t want to live like that . It was horrible going back and getting . cursed by my dad but there was nowhere to go

I remember praying to Allah that I didn�t want to commit suicide and I didn�t want to live either . I asked him to help me and get me out of

this tough time . Suddenly things started to get better , my uncle�s son who I hadn�t seen for a very long time came to our house and we were attracted to each other . We got married and he is everything I wanted in a husband at that time he was very trusting and gave me freedom and basically let me do what I wanted to in its . limits . He used to pray the jummah salaat and that�s about it

After I had my second child my husband changed , he said that the following Ramadan we will begin to pray salaat and read the Quran translation tapes his father gave to us a couple of years ago . I said well I tried to make excuses that I couldn�t remember to pray may Allah forgive me . So I put the cassette on and began to listen to the Quran I cannot explain what effect it had on me my body started to tremble with fear and tears were flowing from my eyes . I felt like I was the worst person on earth for not living the way Allah swt has told us . I began to pray five times a day and read all the Quran by meaning , that Ramadan I will never forget as it changed my life and my husband�s forever . Since then we have become stronger in our faith I have began to wear a hijab and my husband has kept a beard . He

intends to perform Hajj next year Insha Allah and I pray that Allah calls for me and makes a way for me too as I have three young sons whom we are trying to in our best ability to bring them up as the Quran and the prophet Muhammad (peace be upon . him) has told us to

I have made it my life to gain knowledge about the Islamic way of life and pray that we all get Allah�s guidance before it is too late . My message to all my Muslim brothers and sisters is to not just recite the Quran but actually understand the message Allah has sent for all mankind through the Prophet as a guidance to us to save us from the punishment of the hellfire , and for us to be successful in achieving Allah�s mercy and heaven as a reward . Ameen

Holy Quran ٧٢ : ١٣

And that when we heard the guidance , we believed in it; so whoever believes in his . (Lord , he should neither fear loss nor being overtaken (by disgrace

(YUSUF ABDULLAH (JOSEPH ZAMMIT

Since childhood I was gifted with the sincere love for God and I was very sensitive to spiritual/religious things . I used to re-tell the stories about the saints to my mother while she was doing the housework . I spent my time reading the life stories of saints and the prophets in the Old Testament , as well I was highly fascinated with Jesus (Peace be on him) . In my late teens

about ١٧ years old , this childhood fascination took a drastic turn when a priest gave , me a copy of the Plain Truth magazine . Immediately curious , I embarked on a . correspondence course in Bible study

Slowly but surely I was becoming aware of something beautiful in the Bible which was . missing

I could not accept the teachings of the church anymore as they did not inspire me at all . I couldn�t understand how and why our society is so anti-Christian in its values . Religion was for inside the church only ! On the other hand , I wanted to seek the inner , true teachings of the prophets and of Jesus (Peace on them all) in particular . I started using the Psalms as my daily prayers and for the first time I got satisfaction . and power from prayers so much that tears would flow down my cheeks

As my thirst and hunger increased , I started studying various mystical paths , as well as psychology . I started reading Tibetan Buddhism , as well as the Sufis who made a very good impression on me , but I brushed them aside as being Muslims . I studied the Hindu mystics , the Upanishads , the Bhagavad Gita , then on to the Theosophists , Buddhism , Zen and Tao yoga . During these years I used to correspond with initiates . in these religions in the UK

Simultaneously , I started studying Gnosticism , and this reverted me back to

the Bible studies . I studied a lot of good books by Jewish scholars as well as international Bible scholars about many contradictions in the Bible . Next thing was that I contacted various Rosicrucian Orders and being a member in a couple of them . The Rosicrucians claim to be gnostic and freemasons and they promise the initiate to receive Cosmic Power etc . I was still going back , every now and then , to Sufi philosophy and mysticism and still was impressed and attracted by their simplicity and inner love for Allah . The Sufis touched my heart as nothing else did . In ١٩٨۶ I decided to cut off my name and membership in the Catholic Church . I did this officially through the legal methods available . This was one of the most challenging things I did , alhamdulillah.

In ١٩٨٩ I made contact with an Indian Master of high standing and was initiated . This Path is purely mystical and within the folds of the Sikh religion . At last , I said this is it . I was initiated into it for ١١ whole years when I started to see similarities in the teachings to Sufi teachings , which I kept interested in . This was very interesting and I started investigating further the issue . I found out , to my amazement and satisfaction , that the Path was influenced , way back in the ١۶th century , by Sufi teachings and mysticism . Interest again flared

up within me regarding the Sufis and so decided to go back to the roots of it , therefore studying more deeply the Sufi Way , which more and more was influencing me . The great obstacle was that real Sufis were Muslims�or worked within the Islamic religion . I found many so called International sufi orders which were neutral to religion but these I wasn�t attracted to . I kept on asking why do I have to be a Muslim in order to be a sufi ? To become a Muslim is considered as a big �treason� in a Catholic country like Malta . At this period in my life , I increased my prayers fervently and the yearning within me exploded . To my amazement and bewilderment , I found myself reading the Quran , the Holy scripture that is obviously so close to what Jesus taught , as well as the Old testament Prophets , that I laughed at myself . for having missed it (or bypassed it) in my studies

Reading the Holy Quran was the pivot in my life . I started exploring the Pillars of Islam and by the help and mercy of Allah I gathered strength enough to embrace Islam on Laylat-u-l-Qadr in year ٢٠٠٠ . My studies of Sufis became deeper and I made . contact with a couple of Tariqas , employing their daily wasifas and dhikr

AFTERTHOUGHT

Here I must emphasise the real cause behind my whole life . Since childhood I wanted . God and God alone

Whatever Prophet , Guru , Master I met with , it was only for the glory of God . God was and still is my aim , my life , my breath . Since childhood , I always thought about death . Being rich , having a nice family , being healthy , having a beautiful wife etc etc�so what ? I have to die , then� ? Therefore , I was sincere and took life seriously . I used to pray and pray and cry �Oh Allah ! If I succeed in finding You just before I die , my whole life would have been a success ! � Going through life , in all its . materialistic attractions and deviations , still my heart pointed towards God

Having arrived at the stage where I was a candidate student in one of the oldest Sufi Schools , I thought now this is really it . But Allah knows best . This year [۲۰۰۲] , one week before embarking for the Hajj , casually I met a Muslim couple from UK at the local masjid . I had a very good conversation with them and in the night they gave me some books to read . I realised they were from the shia . I was so fascinated by one of the books they gave me that I made it a point to contact them at the Hotel next morning , but alas ! They had flown back home . I went to the Hajj fully

convinced that the shia are the true Muslims . So , I advise anyone to keep himself/herself open and let God do the work . We must have yearning , longing and . be sincere in our prayers , then Allah does it all

Your brother in Islam

Holy Quran ٢ : ٩٧

Say : Whoever is the enemy of Jibreel- for surely he revealed it to your heart by Allah�s command , verifying that which is before it and guidance and good news for . the believers

(ABDUL–LATEEF ABDULLAH (STEVEN KRAUSS

part ١

My journey to Islam - How Malay martial arts led a theologically dissatisfied American . Protestant to Islam

My experience in Islam began as a graduate student in New York City in ١٩٩٨ . Up to that point in my life , for ٢٥ years , I had been a Protestant Christian , but had not been practicing my religion for quite some time . I was more interested in �spirituality� and looking for anything that didn�t have to do with organized religion . To me , Christianity was out of touch and not relevant to the times . It was hard for me to find anything in it that I could apply to my everyday life . This disillusion with Christianity led me to shun everything that claimed to be organized religion , due to my assumption that they were all pretty much the same , or at least in terms of their lack . of relevance and usefulness

Much of my frustration with Christianity stemmed from its lack of knowledge

and guidance around the nature of God , and the individual�s relationship to Him . To me , the Christian philosophy depends on this rather bizarre intermediary relationship that we are supposed to have with Jesus , who on one hand was a man , but was also divine . For me , this difficult and very vague relationship with our Creator left me searching for something that could provide me with a better understanding of God , and our relationship to Him . Why couldn�t I just pray directly to God ? Why did I have to begin and end every prayer with �in the name of Jesus Christ ? � How can an eternal , omnipotent Creator and Sustainer also take the form of a man ? Why would He need to ? These were just a few of the questions that I could not resolve and come to terms with . Thus , I was hungry for a more straightforward and lucid approach to religion that could provide my life with true guidance , not just dogma . that was void of knowledge based in reason

While in graduate school I had a Jewish roommate who was a student of the martial arts . While I was living with him he was studying an art called silat , a traditional Malaysian martial art that is based on the teachings of Islam . When my roommate would come home from his silat classes he would tell me all about the uniqueness of silat and

its rich spiritual dimension . As I was quite interested in learning martial arts at the time , I was intrigued by what I had heard , and decided to accompany my roommate to class one Saturday morning . Although I did not realize it at the time , my experience in Islam was beginning that morning at my first silat class in New York City back on February ٢٨th , ١٩٩٨ . There I met my teacher , Cikgu (which means teacher in Malay) Sulaiman , the man who would first orient me to the religion of Islam . Although I thought I was beginning a career as a martial artist , that day back in ١٩٩٨ actually . represented my first step toward becoming Muslim

From the very beginning I was intrigued by silat and Islam and began spending as much time as possible with my teacher . As my roommate and I were equally passionate about silat , we would go to my teacher�s house and soak up as much knowledge as we could from him . In fact , upon our completing graduate school in the spring of ١٩٩٨ , upon his invitation , we spent the entire summer living with him and his wife . As my learning in silat increased , so did my learning about Islam , a religion that . I had hardly any knowledge of prior to my experience in silat

, What made my orientation to Islam so powerful was that as I was learning about it

I was also living it . Because I studied at the home of my teacher , being in the presence of devout Muslims allowed me to be constantly surrounded by the sounds , sights and practices of Islam . For as Islam is an entire lifestyle , when you are in an Islamic environment , you cannot separate it out from everyday life . Unlike Christianity , which lends toward a separation between daily life and religion , Islam requires its� followers to integrate worship of Allah into everything we do . Thus , in living with my teacher , I was immersed in the Islamic deen (lifestyle) and experiencing first-hand how it can shape one�s entire way of life .

In the beginning Islam was very different and powerful to me . It was also very foreign in many ways and the amount of discipline it requires was difficult to understand . At the time I was liberal in many ways , and was used to shunning anything dogmatic or imposed , regardless of where it came from ! As time went on , however , and my understanding of Islam grew , I began to slowly see that what seemed to be religious dogma was really a lifestyle put forth to us by our Creator . This lifestyle , I would later learn , is the straight path to true contentment , not just the sensual and superficial way of life that my society and culture promote . I realized that the question is

quite simple actually . Who could possibly know better what the best way of life is for ? human beings than the all-wise Creator

From that first silat class in New York City to the day I took my shahadda , July ٣٠ , ١٩٩٩ , I had undergone a thorough self-examination that was comprised of two major processes . One was to question the culture of the society I was brought up in , and the second was to question the role I wanted religion to play in my everyday life . As . for my culture , this one was not as difficult as most people would think

American culture is highly influential on how we see life because it constantly bombards us with sensual gratification aimed at appealing to our worldly desires . In America happiness is defined by what we have and consume , thus , the entire culture is geared toward the marketplace . Unless we are removed from this type of environment it is difficult to see it�s drawbacks , which are based on worshipping and putting faith in everything but God , the only One that can provide us with real , . lasting contentment in our lives

part ٢

Being a social scientist by trade , much of my professional time is spent trying to address the social ills of our society . As I learned more about Islam , I came to the conclusion that many societal ills are based on unhealthy social behaviour . Since Islam is a lifestyle

focused totally on the most healthy , positive way of conducting our lives in every setting , then it is , and will always be , the only real answer to any of society�s social dilemmas . With this realization , not only did I decide that Islam was relevant to my everyday life , but I began to understand why it is so different from other religions . Only Islam provides knowledge and guidance for every aspect of life . Only Islam provides a way to achieve health and happiness in every dimension of life � physical , spiritual , mental , financial , etc . Only Islam provides us with a clear life goal and purpose . And only Islam shows us the proper way to live in and contribute to a community . Islam is what everyone needs , and what so many who have not found it yet , are searching for . It is the path to purpose , meaning , health and happiness . . This is because it is the straight path to the source of truth and real power � Allah

It was only until I actually became Muslim that I realized just how encompassing the Islamic lifestyle is . Literally everything we do has one underlying purpose � to remember Allah . The lifestyle provides us with the way � not just the understanding � but an actual method of constantly remembering our Creator in as simple an act as greeting someone , or getting dressed in

the morning , or waking up from sleep . Islam shows us that by remembering Allah , everything we do becomes focused on Him , and thus becomes an act of worship . From this , our energy , our thoughts , and our actions all become redirected away from unhealthy and useless causes , and focused on the source of all goodness . Thus , we are continuously tapping into His divine strength , mercy and grace . So , by remembering Allah constantly , we become stronger and healthier in every aspect of . our lives and not distracted by self-defeating thoughts and behaviours

There still remain some minor aspects of Islam that have proven to be somewhat difficult adjustments for me . Nevertheless , I thank Allah everyday for the ease to which he has allowed me to make the necessary changes in my life so that I can continue to live in America and still be , Insha-Allah , a good Muslim . As a white , middle-class American , many cultural aspects of Islam are quite different from the way in which I grew up . In fact , when I finally broke the news to my family that I had become Muslim , almost all of their questions and concerns were related to cultural differences � marriage , social life , family , etc . They were much less concerned about my general beliefs about God and religious practice . For my family , friends , and co-workers , becoming

Muslim was not seen necessarily as a negative change , but it has required a great .deal of education about Islam

Because acquiring knowledge is a critical component to a Muslim�s development , having a teacher who has taught me how to apply Islam in everyday life has made all the difference in managing whatever difficulties I have experienced from my reversion . Having someone knowledgeable you can turn to whenever you have questions is a wonderful support that every new shahada should go out of their way to find . Islam is not a religion that can be rationalized , in the way that Christianity and Judaism are . It is a clear path that must be followed just as Allah has laid out for us through the Qur�an and the lives of our beloved Prophet Muhammad (SAW) , his .companions , and the saints of Islam

In this day and age , in this society , discerning the path can often be difficult , especially when we are constantly faced with questions and doubts from people who on the surface may not be hostile to Islam , but whose general lack of faith can have a harmful effect on someone who bases everything they do on their love for Allah . It is also not easy being in an environment where we are constantly bombarded with sensual temptations that are seen as ordinary , common aspects of everyday life . But , when we have the support of a knowledgeable , experienced teacher

who is able to apply the universal teachings of Islam to his life , then the truth becomes clear from error , exactly how Allah (SWT) describes in the Qur�an . From this , we are able to understand how to apply Islam correctly to our own lives , and Insha-Allah receive Allah�s many blessings . The ultimate test , however , of anyone who claims to have true and right knowledge , is to look at how they apply it in their own lives . If their actions support their teachings , then and only then should we look .to them for guidance

My journey to Islam has been a life-altering experience . It is one that with every passing day , makes me more and more appreciative and thankful to Almighty Allah . The extent of His mercy can only fully be understood from the perspective of a Muslim . � one who prostrates regularly and submits their will to that of the Creator

I look back at my life prior to Islam and reflect on the different ways I sought guidance . I think back to all the different ideas I once had of who God really is , and how we can become close to Him . I look back now with a smile and perhaps even a tear because now I know the truth . Through Islam , I know why so many people who do not believe have so much fear inside them . Life can be very scary without

God . I know , because I once harboured that same level of fear . Now , however , I have the ultimate �self-help� program . It�s the self-help program without the self . It�s the path that puts everything is in its proper place . Now , life makes sense . Now , life is order . Now , I know why I am here , where I want to go , what I want my life to be , how I want to live , and what is most important not just to me , but to everyone . I only hope and pray that others who have not found the path yet , can feel �the same that I do . Ya arhama rahimeen wal hamdulillahi rabbil aylameen

Holy Quran ۳ : ۹۶

Most surely the first house appointed for men is the one at Bekka , blessed and a .guidance for the nations

SISTER MARDIYYAH

I am a forty seven year old wife , mother of three and grandmother of one . I was born brought up as a Methodist Christian . As a child I was Christened and sent to Sunday school , even becoming a Sunday school teacher . Both at Sunday school day school I always came top in religious instruction exams . Even then though , I remember thinking that I wished I could really believe and accept Christianity wholeheartedly , but I always felt that something was wrong or something missing . Why if there was only

one God did we worship Jesus ? How if God was not human could he have a Son ? Why did we refer to God as three- the Holy Trinity ? As far as I was concerned God was God , on his own � Full Stop ! My father�s family were not practising Christians but my mothers were . My great grandfather had even been responsible for the setting up of the Methodist Chapel in his village . This was the same chapel I attended and where my family were very well known and always treated with the utmost . respect

After I met my future husband , who told me he was an atheist , I stopped attending Chapel and teaching at the Sunday school . Over the next few years my husband I had three children and like a lot of people I followed the traditions of my family and had them christened and sent them to Sunday school . I may not have agreed wholeheartedly with Christianity but I had nothing better to offer them . I attended weddings , christenings burials and some Easter Christmas Services and Chapel Anniversary Services , always thinking that I really wanted to believe more than I did . and always feeling something was missing

Having three children my life was always busy and I didn�t really give much thought to religion on a day to day basis but then about fifteen years ago I became involved in local politics . Attending a party

political conference , one of my fellow delegates was a Doctor , a Bangladeshi Muslim . We struck up a friendship and would talk , not just about Politics but many other things including religion . I had for some time admired things like Islamic buildings and art , I also liked the clothing that Indian women (not necessarily Muslim wore �Salwar Kameez , particularly the printed fabrics and scarves) . From the few things I had learnt about Islam and Muslims from newspapers etc . I could see that my colleague was a pretty poor Muslim . I found out that he only prayed once a day , didn�t fast , and hadn�t been on Hajj , but this somehow got to me and I started . reading anything and everything I could find about Islam

Over the next ten or twelve years I had periods when I would read extensively and periods when I wouldn�t give it a thought . I quickly began to admire the ethics of Muslim families , the way children were taught respect for their elders , the way they all spoke up for each other . I also began to feel the need to speak up for them , it . always appeared they were the ones to be persecuted

About three years ago I realised that I was spending more and more time thinking about Islam and that without realising it I would steer conversations with friends around to this subject . I also noted that I was very

slowly changing my own habits , dressing more discreetly , not drinking , praying (not as a Muslim) , something I had not done for a very long time . I then found myself saying this is ridiculous I am not a Muslim I am a Christian and I would go out of my way to convince myself of this . I changed my job and went to work in London for the first time and made sure that I always went out with colleagues to bars and restaurants after work , I bought more showy clothes , I am sorry to say that I neglected my family duties , I was too tired to do housework and cooking . My husband sons (my daughter had by now gone to University and set up home on her own) had to fend for themselves . My Muslim friend asked why I was doing this to my family and I told him about my feelings for Islam , I guess he wasn�t all bad as his response was to buy me an English translation of the Qu�ran . I was hooked !

January ٢٠٠١ I made one last attempt to convince myself that I was not a Muslim , I changed my job again . This time to work for a West End theatre producer , even more partying . But it didn�t work and I quickly realised that I was making myself physically sick . I developed several different illnesses all with symptoms brought about (according

to my doctor) by stress . I was taking several types of medication . One day at the beginning of September ٢٠٠١ I was reading the Qu�ran when without realising what I was doing I said the Shahadah to myself and felt the most wonderful sense of completeness and a serenity I had never felt before . I made the decision there and then that I would find somewhere to really learn how to become a Muslim and to say Shahadah again , but this time in front of witnesses . My only worry was how I would find the courage and words to tell my family of my decision . I had been married for twenty-eight years by now but still didn�t really know what my husband�s beliefs were or how any of my family would react .

Imagine my horror therefore and I am sorry to say the anger I felt when I came back from lunch on ١١th September to be confronted with pictures on the Internet of the planes flying into the world trade centre . Over the next few days and weeks I would hear people say that all Muslims were alike and that they should all be thrown out of the country etc , etc . I found myself defending them saying not all Muslims were terrorists any more than all Roman Catholics supported the IRA and were we going to throw out all Irish people . I soon realised however that now was not the time to break my

news . I decided to keep it to myself . Ramadam came and I remembered that I had just a couple of months earlier imagined I would be fasting . I spent Christmas with my family as I have always done , this year cooking for twenty people . I travelled to Scotland two days before New Year only to spend new years eve travelling back to England , as I was unwell . We arrived home with fifteen minutes to spare before midnight and I made a resolution that I would give up my job in London and work part time locally so that I would have time to learn Arabic and really make the effort to . become a good Muslim

I decided to write to two local Mosques . I desperately wanted to learn how to pray as a Muslim but knew that I couldn�t just walk into a Mosque . I was terrified I would do something wrong and really offend someone or that they would be really un-welcoming . I got no response from either of my letters . One day however I found a book with a rough outline of a prayer in � I think the book was meant for school children- but anyhow I followed the instructions and prayed . I knew then I had made the right decision . I also knew I had to find the courage to tell my family , but how ? It was at this time that I sent two emails which

were to be the most important of my life . One was to a site for new converts and one was to an Islamic Centre in a nearby town . To my amazement they were both answered . Within two weeks of this I was to meet two amazing groups of people who welcomed me into their midst . Within a month I had said Shahadah in front of witnesses as I had hoped for.

I was now a Muslim and somehow I had to find a way of telling my family . I now had a son in law and a grandson as well as my own children . A Jewish son in law in fact albeit non-practising . One evening when I was reading the Qu�ran , before I had had a chance to tell my husband he asked when I was going to change my faith . He was very shocked to begin with but we talked and I told him how happy I felt and that I hoped he would try to understand and to find out why I had come to this decision . I think he has coped amazingly well especially as I had felt a need to wear Hijab almost immediately , probably because it has taken me so many years to get this far.

My children seem to have accepted the changes I have made , although like their father they find the wearing of Hijab rather strange but they are persevering and have actually commented on

. how much happier and relaxed I seem

My son in law has actually been the one who has so far shown the most interest , asking questions about various aspects , and although he has reservations about explaining to my grandson why I wear a scarf and his own mother doesn�t , he is trying hard to be accepting . Unfortunately it has been my daughter who is most against it . Unfortunately some years ago she had a relationship of her own with a Muslim guy who didn�t treat her very well and I feel this has coloured her judgement .

As for my husband we have now talked and I have found that his own beliefs are not that dissimilar to my own , but he just believes that religion should be private and that in this modern age we should keep our beliefs to ourselves and not go out of our way . to make our beliefs obvious to others i . e . wearing Hijab

Slowly our lives are changing , there are those who say I should move quicker and can�t do this or that any more , but I know my family and if I want them to accept . Islam for themselves I know I have to be patient

Holy Quran ۴۲ : ۲۳

That is of which Allah gives the good news to His servants , (to) those who believe and do good deeds . Say : I do not ask of you any reward for it but love for my

near relatives; and whoever earns good , We give him more of good therein; surely . Allah is Forgiving , Grateful

KHAYREYAH BINT TOM SAWYER

Peace and Blessings

Whoever works righteousness , man or woman , and has Faith , verily , to him will We give a new Life , a life that is good and pure and We will bestow on such their reward according to the best of their actions . ١٦ : ٩٧

As a young child I wasn�t really into religion . I didn�t believe that Jesus could be God and be the son of God . It didn�t make any sense to me . So for just about all of my childhood I was non-religious . I believed that there was a God deep down in my heart , I just hadn�t found the Truth yet . But when I was in ١٠th grade I took a class called Religion and Human Culture . I still wasn�t much in to religion but the culture part caught my eye . Well , I took the class and my teacher said he didn�t know much about other religions (he was Christian) but he would try to get us some basic info . We had a book filled with info from other religions , Islam was one of those religions . I found all of the religions interesting but Islam really stuck in my mind . I ended up not passing the class due to too many absences . So , I retook the class in ١١th grade

It was a little different because a different teacher taught it but I still loved it . Islam . went even deeper into my heart even though I really didn�t know that at the time . I started going to the school library reading about Islam . But when I got into ١٢th grade for some reason I stopped researching . Maybe it was the excitement of it being my last year , who knows ? But Islam was still there in my heart . After high school was out , that summer I met my husband . We met at a wedding reception that neither of us had planned on going to . I had twisted my ankle that day and he had just got back from New York . But we both went anyway . I saw him and thought he was fine : o) We kept looking at each other off and on . He came over to ask my friend to dance , she declined . He asked me and I declined too . . . I thought he was interested in my friend . Anyways , he did come back over again and ask me to dance , I accepted . After we danced we sat down and started talking . He asked me what religion I was , I said I didn�t have one but I was interested in Islam and had been studying . He said he was doing the same ! From that day on we have

been together , over ٩ years ! I was ١٨ when we met . Anyways . We ended up moving to Michigan because he got transferred there from his job . It was there in Michigan that we got married and took shahada together , both in the same day . It was overwhelming for me . I knew Islam was right but I wasn�t really ready to accept it yet . I was happy to be married and to be a Muslim , I just wasn�t quite ready to be a Muslim . I took my shahada more for my husband than for myself . I made mistakes , we all do . I just didn�t feel right being a Muslim and having these mistakes hanging over my head . So , finally on August ١٧th ٢٠٠١ I decided that I had to retake my shahada , I had to be a Muslim , this time in my heart , mind and soul . So on August ١٩th , ٢٠٠١ I retook shahada and let me tell you ! The feelings wow ! When Magda (the beautiful Sister who took me through shahada) said , �Ok , you�re a Muslim now� , I cried ! I had never felt so deeply about Islam until then . I had embraced Islam totally and completely and I had never felt so good in my life until that day . That day my whole world changed and I thank Allah so much for giving me the chance

to come back to Islam ! Through it all He has guided me more than I will ever know . He has given me amazing gifts , my children and step daughter . He has given me a wonderful husband , a wonderful family of Brothers and Sisters masha�allah . I will never be able to thank Him enough for all that He has given to me . . . I would like to end this with a poem . . .

, Dearest Allah

, I wish to thank You for the life You have given me

, Dearest Allah

, I wish to thank You for giving me the opportunity to see

, Dearest Allah

, I wish to thank You for the family that You�ve given me

, Dearest Allah

, I wish to thank You for setting me free

, Dearest Allah

, I wish to thank You for blessing me with Your presence

, Dearest Allah

, I wish to thank You for helping me to see Your very essence

, Dearest Allah

, I wish to thank You for showing me the Way

, Dearest Allah

, I wish to thank You for all of my days

, Dearest Allah

, I wish to thank You for Your guidance and love

, Dearest Allah

. I wish to meet You and be with You in the Heavens above

Holy Quran ٧ : ٥٢

And certainly We have brought them a Book which We have made clear with . knowledge , a guidance and a mercy for a people who believe

RAJA FERRELL

I am a revert . I became muslim on July ٢١st

of ٢٠٠٠ . One night I was sitting at this computer , thinking of nothing , watching my screensaver bouncing around . Then for no reason I started to cry . I felt pain in my heart so bad . Then I felt and somehow heard the word Islam . Then I felt and or heard in my mind the word Muslim . Now since Jan ١ ٢٠٠٠ I had felt the desire to change . And these changes came slow but dramatic . I quit drinking , smoking . I had the desire to cover . So I started wearing loose pants with big legs . Still I was kaffar as a kaffar can be . But on July ٢١st Allah thought I was ready . So as soon as these words went thru my heart I started searching online . I found out how to do shahada , I did it . I got in an Islamic chat room , of course there seemed to be everything in there but a muslim . I typed that I think I�m a Muslim , some made fun , others laughed . Then I got an Instant message from this brother . He asked if I was Muslim . I told him I think so , I did shahada , he said lets do it together , so he took me step by step thru shahada again , by then I was crying I was so happy and excited . It was like ٤ in the

morning , he told me to find a masjid and do shahada in front of Imam and the Imam would teach me Islam . I found one close ٣٠ miles away , it was in a town called Riverdale . I didn�t tell anyone about my shahada , my husband came home and said , he had to go to Riverdale , my heart almost stopped , I told him I�m going too . After he took care of his business , I told him the directions to where I needed to be . We went there . The Imam was as excited as I was , he told me to bring my husband inside . I got him in there , I did shahada again . The Imam asked my husband if he knew what I had done , he said yes but he didn�t really know until later after it all hit him . The Imam told me to cover and gave me dress code hijab etc . I didn�t have the clothes , had a piece of cloth that covered my hair . I wore it . The Imam invited me to have breakfast with his wife . We went out , the women together and the brothers together . I was invited to some scholars that were with them . The imam�s wife gave me some clothes to wear , and hijabs , I was on my way . My husband flipped out late as he saw the transformation , I

went from tight levis and short tops to abayas and hijab then a few months later to . full hijab niqab , gloves etc

Holy Quran ٧ : ١٥۴

And when Musa�s anger calmed down he took up the tablets , and in the writing . thereof was guidance and mercy for those who fear for the sake of their Lord

FA�IZAH JAUHARAH

My journey to Islam , or as I call it my adulthood ١٧ year journey through the . wilderness of darkness – really began in childhood

For as long as I can remember , I�ve had a great thirst for knowledge , and knowing about other religions was no exception . I grew up the only daughter of divorced parents – a Christian mother and , as I later learned , a Muslim father . As I got a little older I began to feel some dissatisfaction with our denomination of choice , but as a . dutiful child I did as my mother told me

The teachings of that denomination and finally Christianity itself just didn�t seem logical; and the more I read the more convinced I became that something wasn�t right . I tried asking questions of my family and of the pastors , but instead of getting answers I was dismissed as just a mere child . Somehow , the phrase �And the little child shall lead them� or �Suffer the little children to come unto me� just didn�t apply to me . Yet I just had to know . I mean I was smart

so how anyone could say that Jesus died on a Friday and rose on the third day and , then tell me that the third day was a Sunday , mathematically was impossible . Or even something as simple as God created the heavens and the earth and all that was upon it is six days and rested on the seventh , yet we went to church on Sunday – the day the calendar says is the first day . In my mind , these were simple questions and all I wanted were simple answers . I admit some of my questions were a bit more complicated . For example , how come some denominations allowed women to be ? spiritual leaders , but not the Catholic Church

As I grew into a teenager , my questions became much deeper . I couldn�t understand , for example , how the preacher could say that we should not be concerned with material things but rely upon God to provide; yet he was always dressed in the best clothing , drove a fancy car and lived in a great house , often at church expense , while many in the congregation didn�t have much . Then let�s not even talk about tithing – I�m supposed to give ١٠٪ of my gross income , something I never actually see (okay so I didn�t have a job at the time , but still it was the principle) to God , but I was taught that God had no need of

. money

Although my father wasn�t around much as I was growing up , in retrospect I realize that his influence was ever-present . I was raised in a way that was very Islamically based . I had to dress in a lady-like fashion , I couldn�t �hang out� with boys or in the streets with my friends and I needed to account for my whereabouts at all times . I would get into lots of trouble if a boy who lived near me walked with me home from school . This was problematic when I was the manager of the boys� track team in high school because several of the boys lived near my house and the coach insisted that they make sure I arrived home safely , otherwise they would be in trouble with him . We came up with a creative solution , but I didn�t like the idea of being sneaky and neither did they . After all , we weren�t doing anything wrong , just walking home after practice; but we did what we could to make sure that my family and our . coach were happy

Also during this time , my mother advised me or should I say ordered me , not to get involved with a Muslim man - ever . Her reason was that Muslim men oppress women . Women weren�t allowed to work , were forced to live in poverty , had to completely cover up themselves , couldn�t do anything without her husband�s permission and the

. biggy – might have to share her husband with several wives

She often recounted the numerous times when before their divorce , how my father would give all his money to the mosque even if it meant I went without shoes . What she didn�t tell me was that he was not following pure Islam at the time , but was following the teachings of Elijah Muhammad and Malcolm X of the Nation of Islam , . which was very popular especially during the ١٩٦٠�s

As a dutiful child I stayed away from obtaining any knowledge about Islam , because I . trusted my mommy and knew she wouldn�t tell me anything false

Finally , the time came for me to go away to college . It was during this time that my adulthood journey through the wilderness of darkness began . I tried to be like my peers and wear short , fashionable skirts and go to parties and the like . I wasn�t accepted with this crowd . I was told I was too serious – I was too focused on getting an education . Yet despite this , I got in �trouble� and mommy made the decision to get me out of it . That made me �lose it� as is often said . I started to fight and disobey my mother . I even met a Muslim man on campus . He was nothing like my mother said . He treated me like a queen and never made me feel unintelligent or childlike

despite the difference in our ages . I felt that I could trust him and he wanted to marry me and take care of me . Unfortunately we got into a fight; one caused because I simply lacked knowledge of Islam and therefore didn�t understand certain terminology . I was too ashamed of how I reacted to apologize to him , so instead I found myself agreeing with my mother�s assessment of Muslim men and so I left . college , and began my journey

I thought my life would be better , but the only blessings I received were my children – and even with them I�ve had to struggle , mostly because I was a single mother . The father of my daughters lived with me for many years but because he was so busy �building his empire� as he called it , I was still a single mother doing everything for my children and working and going back to college . Finally , I found out what he was doing – he was involved in drugs and was sleeping with other women , so we parted . company

I fell apart , but then , looking into my children�s faces , I knew I had to pull myself together – if only for them . Even in the face of immediate homelessness , I pressed on . I turned to the church for comfort , guidance and assistance , as it was the only place I knew . I was blessed to be able

to buy a home and give a future to my daughters . All was going along fine , but then I felt that I needed someone to ease my burden . So I met someone and got married . We had a son and things should have been wonderful , but they weren�t . The father of my daughters took me to court and lied not only on me , but also on our oldest daughter and stole my youngest with the courts permission in ١٩٩٩ . I�m still trying to get her home – she is in danger with him and his new wife – the woman he was sleeping around with . My marriage fell apart , because my husband insisted that he heard the voice of god and was told that I was disobedient so he didn�t have to take care of us , even to the point of denying us groceries . I know now I was in an abusive marriage , yet all of my intelligence didn�t show me that at the time . Allah , tried to show me , but I ignored Him , but Allah did not leave me even then . I was so blessed . but didn�t even know it

All throughout this time , I was still struggling to find a church where I fit in . I couldn�t . The unanswered questions and the treatment of women in several denominations was just too real to be dismissed; so I stopped going but continued as

best I could to keep my faith strong . So to hear my husband say that God told him that it was okay to mistreat me and the children just made me angry and more confused , because it felt like I was being punished for doubting what the church . leaders told me . He finally left and I thought God had left me too

Then one day in June ٢٠٠١ , I met a wonderful Muslim man . I thought he was decreed to be my new husband . He was not – but rather he was the catalyst that led me to finally opening my heart to the life I should have been leading all along – Islam . So I read everything I could find , trying to understand just what the status of women was and what was a man�s responsibility to a woman . Not only was I surprised to find that my mother was incorrect but I was also pleased to find answers to the questions I had asked for so long . My life had new meaning and purpose . I immediately and without hesitation made shahada and felt a great weight lifted from me . My journey through the wilderness of darkness – the darkness of misinformation , wrong . guidance and ignorance was over

Knowing how my mother felt about Muslim men , I was afraid to tell her; then I realized that perhaps her feelings were deeply personal and as a loving mother she wanted to

shield me from similar hurts through the benefit of her experience . I loved my mother even more at that moment of realization - but I was still afraid to tell her . Finally , after much prayer I picked up the phone and in a round about way , told her how my life had changed . I explained that for so long I had felt uncertain about Christianity and what was said , taught and written; the half-truths and untruths and the changes that had been made over the years to suit man�s needs . I further explained to her that I had found what I was seeking - peace and unaltered truth -- in Islam . I expected her to start a lecture on why I shouldn�t get involved in an Islamic lifestyle and certainly not Muslim men; instead , she quietly and calmly confirmed what I had identified as the real issue - my father�s treatment of her in his days of wrong guidance . Mothers never cease to amaze; just when you think you have them figured out , they go and do something like this . I lost my dear Mother recently , so this is now one of her last and precious gifts to me -- the gift of understanding . I had some precious last moments with her and although she was very tired , I believe that she repeated shahada while I held her hand and recited it . I love my Mother and miss her

. already

During our talk , I reminded my mother of how tired and discouraged I had become with working and how I would be perfectly content to stay at home , even though she had always taught me to be independent and have my own money . Once again , my mother surprised me . She said that she knew that�s how I felt and that she respects me for it and knows that I would indeed be happy as long as I could fill my days with what is important to me . The more I read , the more I understand that the role of single mother is not what Allah describes in the Quran . I long for the life that I know I can have by pleasing Allah and doing as he says in the �perfect guidebook for life� . . I know that when Allah decrees it , it shall be

I have much yet to do to break out of ways that have become commonplace for me because of circumstances , so while my journey through the wilderness of darkness is over , my journey along the right and straight path and finally to Jennah continues . This is a journey that I can make and know that I will not be alone - although we all . make the journey by ourselves to please Allah

All I can say is All praise to Allah . I was never alone even as I wandered through that . wilderness of darkness

Holy Quran

And We have not revealed to you the Book except that you may make clear to them that about which they differ , and (as) a guidance and a mercy for a people who . believe

ABDULLAH ISLAM

PART ۱

(FORMERLY �KEVIN COMBES� WAS A BORN AGAIN CHRISTIAN)

To explain to you why I chose Islam , I have to go back before Islam and I was born into a Catholic Protestant family , my Father was Catholic my Mother was Protestant but as my Father ruled the house it was a Catholic family . Now I rejected the Catholic belief at a young age and from then I basically rebelled against this strict lifestyle that I was brought up in . From there I ended up on the streets , doing drugs , all messed up drinking alcohol totally shot . I was dragged out of the gutter by a man who trained me to be a weight lifter , gave me pride back into myself and told me while I was training my body I had to seek a spiritual path as well because physically it�s not enough there must also be a spiritual part of your life . So from there I went on a journey searching all the different faiths and I ended up being a born again Protestant Pentecostal Christian , preaching Jesus to everyone and anyone who would listen and . who wouldn�t listen , basically I became a Bible basher

So from there I traveled overseas , preaching Jesus , and telling

people how Jesus could change their lives , save their life and the whole thing , and I used to debate scripture with people . One brother , a Christian brother , who I led to Jesus come up against me in a debate just at work . He was going on about the Trinity and he pointed out to me a simple thing that the Holy Trinity didn�t come about until ٣٢٥ years after the death of Christ . Ok that�s ٣٢٥ years after the death of Jesus and the resurrection to some people . It was a political move by emperor Constantine at the first council of Nicaea (٣٢٥ AD) to unite the Romans and the Christians together to give him a power base , he basically decreed that Jesus was God and the Roman Sun Gods , because what happened was basically that Greek Roman mythology took over Christianity; Christianity did not take over Greek Roman mythology . The Roman Sun God�s birthday , which was the ٢٥th December became Jesus� birthday . The Roman�s Sunday became the holy Sabbath , also the counsel agreed that Jesus was the Son of God , the only begotten Father , the very God of the very God . And it also declared the Trinitarian concept , the official doctrine of the Pauline Church , which is basically the Roman Catholic Church . Now if you understand the Roman Catholic Church and the Protestant church , all the scriptures came from the Catholic Church ,

so all the canonical Gospels were in hands of the Catholics originally . They made the Gospels of Mathew , Mark , Luke and John , the only four Gospels . After that they went about destroying all the Hebrew Scriptures , there were over three hundred of them , written in the original Hebrew text and many of them were eyewitnesses accounts . So from there in ٣٨٠ Emperor Constantinople of Rome made the Trinitarian base of belief , the Catholic faith obligatory to all his subjects , and it�s been that way since . That�s why Rome is the head of the faith . In ٣٨١ the counsel of Constantinople attended by ١٨۶ Bishops completed the three present head of the Trinity , and they added the God head of the Holy Spirit , and then from there in ٣٨١ Emperor Theodosius threatened to punish all that did not believe in the doctrine of the Trinity . That�s why we have the basic Trinitarian doctrine of all Christian faiths today , except for a few who believe that Jesus was not God , Jesus was a Prophet of God , a messenger of God , similar to Islam . Now the implications of the Trinitarian doctrine are truly obvious , they have nothing to do with the original teachings of Jesus , so for me that was a major , major turning point in my Christian faith , because if Jesus didn�t become God until ٣٢٥ years after his death , what can

. I say , simple , you know this is a man made thing

So I went about while I was preaching Christianity , I was going to preach Christianity to the Muslims . That was my intention , and I started learning about Islam . You go to any Christian bookshop and you will find a whole shelf on Islam . You go to any Islamic bookshop or center you won�t find anything about Christianity . Well the Christians were too busy worrying about the Muslims and the Muslims were too busy getting on with their business . They�re not worried about Christians , honestly the Christians think that the Muslims want to take over the world and that they want to invade this country , and that they want to do all these crazy things; they think that they�re storing guns underneath their Mosques , I assure you I�ve been to every Mosque in Perth and there are no guns . They�re not terrorists , I don�t know a single terrorist . . I have never met one , I don�t know any , I don�t know any with those views

So as I went about studying Islam , while I was a Christian , I could see the similarities between Islam and the Bible . Many of the teachings in the Bible were not necessarily the words that were originally said , it was the actions . Like Moses , being told to take off his shoes when he entered Holy ground , now

never once did I take off my shoes when going to Church . No one did . But yet you go to a Mosque and everyone takes off their shoes , for it is Holy ground . Moses on his knees before God , Now Brothers and Sisters of Islam forgive me if I do not say Allah , but I�m talking to the Christians , and I�ll just use the word God . Because Christians have a tendency to believe that they have their God , and then Allah is a totally separate God , but he is not , he is God . Allah means , the one true God . So God being the One true God , the Creator of the heavens and the earth , the Creator of all things , the Creator of you . Moses was on his knees before God , Daniel on his knees before God , Abraham on his knees before God , Jesus (peace be upon Him) on his knees before God . You go to any Mosque , they are all on their knees before God , Brother and Sisters . I go to a Church , we�re all dancing around in front of a band , like a rock and roll concert , waving our hands about in the air , this is not worship . This is rock and roll . Job accepting the will of God , good or bad . Read your scriptures , understand them , look at

them . Pray morning , noon and night , the only time we prayed was going to Church on Sunday , you walk around talking , if you�re talking to God , you should have a true fear of God , understanding of him , who is the Creator , be down upon your knees , have your head in the sand .

part ٢

To me these were all the things that I could see were not happening in the Church , but were happening in the Mosques; was happening in Islam . In I Thessalonians ٥ : ١٧ it says pray without ceasing . Now I prayed in tongues , a gift from the Holy Spirit , this is babble , nothing more than babble . In Islam there is a prayer when you walk in through the door , a prayer when you walk out through the door , there is a prayer when you walk into the toilet , a prayer when you walk out , a prayer when you hop in your car , a prayer when you hop out , a prayer for everything . In Islam you pray without ceasing , every action in your life is dedicated to Allah (God) . The reverence and the respect of God is not a circus act , hyped up by music and rock and roll bands . Playing and being told that the presence of God was in the place because we were all hyped up on this great music , in

anointing of God simply meant that the band was playing all together , because when . the band wasn�t playing , the anointing wasn�t going too well

Now last time I spoke , I said what was Ishmael�s crime , I didn�t get to go into detail then , so now I�ll go into detail . What was Ishmael�s crime ? As a Christian I was told it didn�t matter if my Mother was a prostitute , a drug addict , my father was a derelict or what ever , I accept that God accepts me , I bow down to God , I believe in God that if I totally accept him he will accept me , that it doesn�t matter . where I�ve been or what I�ve done

Yet in the Old Testament Ishmael was rejected because he was the son of a slave woman , according to the Old Testament . As the son of a slave woman , the promises of God were not attributed to him , because he was a son of a slave woman , what a contradiction in teachings . So what was his crime ? None , he was born to a slave . woman , yet he stills loves God , revered God , worshiped God

I found the Quran to be the most beautiful thing I�d ever heard in the world . I didn�t understand it , but it was beautiful . When I actually read the English text� I can�t put it into words . It

has no contradictions , yet the Bible is full of contradictions . Now I�m not beating up on Christianity here , I�m just telling the things that changed my life , and the .direction that I was heading

Islam is a solution to racism . A little story for you folks , Jesus was not White , blonde haired and blue eyed . He was not necessarily black , but he wasn�t white , he was somewhere in between . Equality of the sexes , I love the fact that Islam ۱۴۰۰ years ago made men equal to women , it�s only ۵۰-۶۰ years ago that women in Western countries actually got equal rights , and yet in Islam they always have had equal rights . Islam preaches tolerance of Christians and Jews . Now as a Christian I was told to love , but yet in their actions and in the actions of how we were , the only time we entertained a Muslim , a Jew , a Buddhist , a Hindu is when we were trying to convert them . Now a Muslim will not Bible bash you or should I say Quran bash you , this statement does not exist in Islam , Quran bashing , because they don�t . If you wish to talk about it , they will talk about it , if you ask questions , they will talk to you about it . We as Muslims believe that you will come into the realization yourself , by

.(the guidance of Allah (God

Ephesians ۶ : ۱۲ For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood but against principalities against powers , against the rulers of the darkness of this age , against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places . All who were not Born again Christians were .deceived by the devil and possessed by evil spirits , this is what I was taught

In Islam we believe that not all Muslims are going to heaven , also that not all Christians and not all Jews will go to heaven; some Muslims , some Christians and some Jews will go to heaven; those who have a love for God and follow his ways and are righteous . But to a Born again Christian all I had to do was accept Jesus , and all my sins were washed away , and I was going to heaven , free ticket . Didn�t matter what I did wrong as long as I pleaded the blood of Jesus over myself , prayed , was repentant was still going to heaven , and everybody else wasn�t going there . Now who am I to make that choice ? Who is this doctrine to make that choice ? The only choice is by God . He decides who goes to heaven and who doesn�t go to heaven , no one else . And only God can forgive your sins , not a man that became God ۳۲۵ years after he walked the Earth . God in

all of his infinite wisdom and power and glory can forgive your sins , just like that . You ;don�t need to accept anything; you just need to be repentant . In the Quran it says

Who could be better in religion than one who submits his whole self to God , does� good and follows the way of Abraham , the true in faith for God did take Abraham for [a friend� [۴ : ۱۲۵

It explains itself right there . What has happened to me since I have become a Muslim ?

I�ve come out of the darkness and into the light; I�m a slave only to Allah . I have .complete internal peace beyond all description , that I never found as a Christian

Now it doesn�t matter if I am going through hassles in my job . Doesn�t matter if I am going through hassles everywhere else . It doesn�t matter if I am being discriminated against , because I am a Muslim , which has happened in this free democratic society that we live in , for I never experienced these things until I became a Muslim . Let me tell you something about discrimination people , you have no idea about discrimination unless you are being discriminated against . You can say �oh no he�s not being discriminated against� or she�s not being discriminated against , because you�re from the outside looking in . But when you are being discriminated , against , when you are being harassed , you know it

not necessarily everybody else . Why did I choose Islam ? Because I simply cannot deny the truth . Islam is the truth and the truth has set me free . Ash-hadu anlaa ilaha . illa allah wa ash hadu anna Muhammadan abduhu wa rasuuluh

. Thank you very much

Holy Quran ٥١ : ٢٣

And by the Lord of the heavens and the earth ! it is most surely the truth , just as you . do speak

JANNAH

Embracing the Truth

Born and raised by righteous parents who still strongly hold onto their identity through religion , it would seem striking that their sole daughter and oldest would depart from their teachings and embrace Islam . From early childhood , I excelled in academics but struggled through religious studies since I was unable to find any logic behind the structure of the Christian doctrines . It would have been easy to deviate from Christianity and explore other beliefs if it had not been for my family�s coercion and of course my young age . Most parents are faced with their children not behaving in their academic courses with other classmates or authority , but I was the child who asked more questions than desired and an over achiever . For a mathematic teacher , an inquisitive student is delightful , but in the realm of religion , especially Catholicism , such deviations from the norm were considered blasphemy . So at the tender age of ten my brother and I took conformation , and then again at eighteen

I accepted the final conformation vows as a Catholic . Why ? A question I so often , asked myself . Was it to make my parents happy or was it a result of my acceptance and submission to God through the authority of the Catholic Church ? So for my parents , I continued to follow what they believed contrary to my own beliefs . This . meant that I would have to search for the answers to my questions elsewhere

Freedom was bestowed upon me as I gathered my belongings and moved to the University dormitory . Of course , this happened to be in the same city where my traditional Puerto Rican family lived but it was enough space to explore and confirm my beliefs . I became fixated with courses in the social sciences but my family�s powerful influence overwhelmed me to the point that my degree would be in science , as they preferred . I needed a nourishing environment , a location where enlightened . people would surround me

Convincing my parents that studying abroad in England would help expand my technique and knowledge of the chemical sciences , I left for six months overseas . To the best of their knowledge at the time , this was an opportunity for me to experience . what they felt they were deprived . Today , they think this was their error as parents

While studying in England , I became acquainted and later best of friends with Muslim girls from Brunei in my

dormitory . I had read about other religions and countries but never had the pleasure of actually knowing such people . Unexpectedly , I decided to travel and explore Europe during the University spring break , ۴ weeks to be precise , while my friends went to visit their families . During this period , I had the opportunity of visiting my first non-Christian environment in Morocco . I stayed in small towns away from tourists and immersed myself into the Moroccan culture . In addition , I saw the vast number of Muslims in Amsterdam and Germany . This led me to deeply question my Muslim friends about their clothing attire , religious differences , food preparation and most of . all their own personal beliefs about being a Muslim

Curiosity now consumed me . My priority was to examine Christianity and prove that my religious beliefs were not irrational even if it meant being considered a heretic by my family and in the eyes of the Catholic Church . I explored the historical roots of the trinity and the bible only to validate my theory that the Christian bible was written to appease the hierarchy of the church and politically strengthen their position of authority . As A . Osman states from his book Out of Egypt : �The Roots of Christianity , �Revealed

The Roman fathers of the early Church , combating what they regarded as heresy ,� began to place this theology in a historical setting , providing locations and dates for the

life of Jesus . These doctrines were enforced by the authorities from the second half of the ۴th century AD , when Rome adopted Christianity , causing it to spread throughout the world . It was when Rome , then the center of civilization , adopted Christianity that old books were burned to destroy the memory of the past , and � . history was rewritten to confirm new interpretations of past events

Arriving in the USA , I was prepared to use my knowledge acquired from my studies and experiences to openly discuss the problems with Christianity and this new religion I had encountered , Islam . I had not yet considered converting , since conversion had never been an idea I thought plausible with my family . It was Allah�s mercy that my mom who had been separated from my father now for three years allowed my father to divorce her and break away from Catholicism . She joined a Pentecost congregation and openly discussed the problems with being a Catholic rather than the concept of being Christian . I felt abandoned , empty and confused . I believed in one God but what were the correct ways to worship , submit and follow . How could I be . righteous when I was blind to the correct path of Allah

I continued course work in religious studies . I became aware of the diversity of religions and their sects of the Caribbean , Middle East and Asia . It was when I touched on

Islam that my heart and mind were satisfied . It finally all made sense . Islam was . inspiring and rational . For the first time , I felt content

My decision to convert now came without hesitation and with strength to be steadfast since I had embarked on a lifetime journey and battle with non-believers . That meant accepting that my worst enemy would not be my neighbor or friend but my own . family

My first two years were the hardest . I faced my family only to engage in a debate over religion that would develop into a harsh argument about my ungratefulness and misuse of an education . I began to cover my hair August ٤th , ٢٠٠٢ a month prior to the ٩-١١ attacks . It was this adversity as well as the constant struggle with my family that I found my self truly and entirely submitting to Allah . Today , my family accepts my beliefs and accommodates our differences . I remind them , �we don�t see through our soul or spirit , but the mind that is between the two� . With time and guidance . from Allah , they too will embrace Islam

Holy Quran ١٨ : ١٣

We relate to you their story with the truth; surely they were youths who believed in . their Lord and We increased them in guidance

LATIFAH ABDULLAH

Assalam alaikum rahmatullah barakatuh

My name is Latifah Abdullah and I am ٢٩ years old . I�ve been muslimah for almost . three years now

I began to investigate

Islam in high school . I was writing a paper on the differences between Islam and the nation of Islam . I didn�t know that there was such a profound difference . Then I read �the message to the black man� by Elijah Muhammad . This book made me a better Christian for a few more years . Then I met my son�s father and husband , and got a renewed interest in Islam . By this time I was twenty-five , pregnant , and wondering what kind of values I would give to my unborn child . I bought myself a Quran and a book on the deen of Islam . I read the Quran out loud to my stomach everyday . I found that the beauty of the message was too beautiful and I didn�t know if I�d ever be able to live up to the ideals that Allah (swt) has set out for us . I was struck by how easy and beautiful the deen is . The language of it held me . I decided to raise my child as a Muslim/Muslimah . I had my baby , a son , and still had not converted . I still read the Quran to him everyday , he was colicky , and the Quran would calm him and put him to sleep . Then on December ٢٦ , ١٩٩٩ , I had a dream of being dressed in white on a lush green hillside . My husband was trying to talk to

me about one of his friends insulting us because of our beliefs . I told his friend that it was the truth and to be quiet and listen to what the thousands of us were listening to . All of his questions would be answered . It was the Quran being recited in Arabic that was the music in my dream . As I looked to the right , I saw my own personal Quran , shining with a pure light . The more the recitation went on the brighter my Quran glowed . I took this to be my time to come to Islam . I converted (reverted) January ١۶ , ٢٠٠٠ . The journey has not always been easy and coming up against traditional attitudes , I have often wanted to rip off my khimar (head covering) and just scream . That never lasts long because I know that Allah (swt) is where all of the answers are . I know that Allah (swt) guided me to the right path and that it is through His Grace that all is possible . I try to answer all questions put to me since ٩/١١ in a respectful manner , befitting a Muslimah , Islam is a mystery still to those in this country . I would not change a single thing that has happened in my life because all of it brought me to Allah . (swt) . I just wish we had a larger community here in my town

Masalam

Holy Quran ٢٠ : ١٠

When

he saw fire , he said to his family : Stop , for surely I see a fire , haply I may bring to . you therefrom a live coal or find a guidance

ABDULLAH J . ARMADA

Life . The very word conjures up images of events past and present , an infinite phantasmagoria of experiences , memories , and mental predictions , which we all go through . What exactly is this experience of life ? A dare ? A quest ? A random mix of experiences ending in inevitable , impersonal annihilation ? Why does it seem that no matter how hard we�ve tried over the ages , man can�t seem to answer the questions as to where we are from , why we are here , and where we are going ? The truth is that humankind has made numerous attempts throughout history to answer these questions and many attempts have come close while others have failed all together . The answer that man has formulated to these questions is religion . Religion and philosophy are attempts to answer these questions in the eyes of humankind . The world today is full of religions and different philosophies , some as old as Hinduism and some as young as Neo-Paganism , and this variety can be confusing to the elite few of my generation who seek the Truth . In an analytical sense , if one were to strip down all the major world religions to their essential core teachings , if one were to eliminate

all the superfluous years and centuries of doctrine , dogma , corruption , innovation , etc . one would be left with one pure , pristine answer to the questions posed above . That answer , which everyone seeks , is God . Where are we from ? God . Why are we here ? God . Where are we going ? God . Later , however , there comes another question . Namely , �how do we attain the peace and love we are all searching for ? � Well , if the answer to the prior questions is God than it follows logically that in order to achieve the peace and love that God provides one must worship Him correctly . But again we are confronted with the same seemingly unsolvable conundrum , �with so many religions around , how do we know which one is correct ? � There is only one answer , one system that has miraculously remained free of the corruption of human hands : Islam . Now , I could of course further elaborate and prove the existence of God , the legitimacy of Islam , etc . but I will opt to leave that for another writing , perhaps , and I will now describe my journey to Islam . I was born and raised as a Roman Catholic and I have attended Catholic schools all of my life , in fact , I still do . By the time I got to eighth grade I decided

that the whole Christianity thing wasn�t working for me�call it my pacifistic adaptation of the usual angst-ridden teen rebellion . Essentially , I figured that I had been raised a Christian all my life and thus , in a sense , I had been indoctrinated into Christianity . So , I decided to try something else�some other way of viewing life . In summary , I tried many religions and each one lasted about one year . I was metaphorically caught in the eternal interplay of the spiritual �tennis court� of life . Most recently , I was Buddhist , and contrary to what most people believe , Buddhists do not worship the Buddha�in fact they have no �god� . Well , technically the Buddha never said you couldn�t believe in a �god� he just said it wasn�t required to attain enlightenment . Well , rather than go off on a tangent I will ask the reader to keep the last point in mind . What basically happened was that I started considering the existence of God . After all , it made logical sense to me , though rather than discuss that now , I�ll save it for a later time . Anyway , as I considered God I began to consider Islam because I had always had an incipient interest in Islam . I remember watching a video at school on world religions and I remember being so intrigued by the movements in the prayer , especially sujood�it was beautiful . I remember

fighting that feeling inside of myself trying to convince myself that I was happy with the belief system I had . I remember looking at my compass , finding the direction of Mecca , and going through the little parts of the prayer movements that I knew always thinking , �If I were Muslim , this is what I�d do to pray . � I remember sounding out the shahada italicised in my �world religions� book thinking , �This would be what I�d say to become a Muslim . � I couldn�t explain why , but I was drawn to Islam and at the same time I fought that feeling because of fear . After September ١١th , my interest was resurrected and with the money I saved I purchased �The Complete Idiot�s Guide to Understanding Islam� by Yahiya J . Emerick . The book was amazing as it outlined everything in a comprehensive manner and made me realize that there were many misconceptions about Islam . Later , I purchased �The Meaning of the Holy Qur�an� by Abdullah Yusuf Ali . All this time , my interest in Islam grew and I was drawn even closer to it . Eventually , I called the ١٨٧٧-WHY ISLAM information line , which I had called many times before . Originally , I was calling to ask a question about a verse I had read but I ended up telling the sister I was speaking to about my interest in Islam and the fear I felt because

of my family . In summary , this sister gave me the push I needed to overcome my fear and convert (revert) . I am eternally grateful to Allah for having put her in my life to help guide me to Islam . At this point , I can respond with confidence that the search , which I undertook to find the Truth has ended in success because the whole Truth , the whole culmination of my search can be summed up in one statement : Ashahadu an la ilaha illa Allah wa Ashahadu anna Muhammadun abduhu wa rasulu . I testify that there is no god but ALLAH and I also testify that Muhammad is His slave and . messenger

Holy Quran ٢٧ : ٢

A guidance and good news for the believers

HOW SIMPLE . . . AND SIMPLY BEAUTIFUL

part ١

Bismillah Walhamdulillah Was Salaatu Was Salaam �ala Rasulillah; As-Salaam Alaikum Wa-Rahmatullahi Wa-Barakatuhu

Who believe in the Unknown , and fulfil their devotional obligations , and spend in� charity of what We have given them; Who believe in what has been revealed to you and what was revealed to those before you , and are certain of the Hereafter . They have found the guidance of their Lord and will be successful . As for those who deny , it is all the same if you warn them or not , they will not believe . Allah has sealed their hearts and ears , and veiled their eyes . For them is great deprivation� [٢ : ٣-٧ Al-Qur�an translation by Ahmed Ali] .

Although there are

far more interesting stories of people becoming Muslim during the times of the Prophet (SWA) , I feel that it is critical to recount to other Muslimahs and non-Muslimahs a story that can be easy to relate to given our current times and circumstances . Let me first give a comprehensive history of who I am , where I came from and who I was before Allah showed me the right path .

I was born in ١٩٧٥ to an upper middle class Christian family living in the farmlands of Eastern Washington . I lead a very happy carefree childhood full of swimming in the lake during the hot desert summers , ice-skating and snow-mobiling in the winters and many boat and horseback rides in between . My life was full of more leisure than worship , as I barely remember going to Church . Except for a few Easters spent looking for money in haystacks at the Golf and Country Club and ripping through piles of presents stacked around the Christmas tree , my understanding of God was limited to such experiences . It was not until many years later that I even realized what the religious reasoning was behind such holidays .

In ١٩٨٢ , my reality became abruptly severed due to the divorce of my parents . The world that I had known became a thing of the past , and I spent a lot more of my time crying and feeling angry than I did frolicking with friends as I had done before

It felt as if my parents had deceived me , and I started to become very unsure about . life . New town , new schoolmates , new neighborhood , and new stepfather ! Change . is an inevitable way of this life , but it was still very foreign to my young mind

During my first few years on the Island , I was fortunate enough to live in the neighborhood where the only Muslim family lived . Since Mariam was my age and her younger brother , Adam , was my sister�s age , we spent many afternoons after school playing in the woods and digging for sea life on the rocky beaches of the north end . I even remember Mariam showing me her Qur�an and explaining to me what it meant to be Muslim . Even at the young age of ١٠ , I found it fascinating , as I have always been very intrigued by other cultures and religions . She also told me cool stories about her dad�s life as a Sonics basketball player . All in all , I enjoyed . spending time with them

Not too long after that we moved to another part of the island , my close friendship with Mariam and her family dwindled . I became friends with a different group of kids and our lives started to separate . Even though I was not spending time with her , I still considered her a friend and would often defend her when immature kids would

make rude comments about her hijab and other Islamic customs . I almost prided . myself on understanding her belief , although not at all extensively

Living in such a small town as I did , made it easy for me to begin associating myself with people and activities that were less than wholesome . Entertainment being scarce , most kids turned to drinking , smoking , sex and experimental drug use . Although I was not as quick to follow the crowd and have always considered myself a leader , I soon followed suit . I was never too wrapped up in the group�s mischievous behaviour , but as my father always said , �Birds of a feather , flock together . � It became hard to disassociate myself from the group . I even remember walking out of school in ١٩٩٠ when we declared war against Iraq during Desert Storm . I knew nothing of the politics of the war and demonstrated in the streets in protest against our involvement in it . I knew nothing of the heinous crimes committed against the Kuwaiti people . I was merely going along with the crowd . God was always in the back of my mind , but I lost myself in my own selfishness and bottled-up hurt from my parent�s break-up . My relationship with my mother worsened as my days in high school continued , until she finally kicked me out at age ١٧ . My father whisked me away to Bellingham that summer

before senior year to set me straight in school and life in general . Hemd�Allah (thank God) that he was there to support me and heal some of those emotional wounds .

That fall , I started at Whatcom Community College fulltime . One of my classes that quarter was Middle Eastern History . I wrote a lengthy research paper on Ancient Egyptian Civilization and learned the truth about many stereotypes and falsehoods relating to Islam and Muslims . The idea behind men as the head of the household and women being modest to avoid the strong sexual desires of men really made sense to me . I also learned from an American Muslim man that lectured the class that Muslims believed in Jesus and did not say that he was the �Son of God� as Christians do . The fact that Muslims believe that Allah is above the mortal qualities of having children really clicked with me .

From that point in late ١٩٩٢ until early ١٩٩٨ , I had little if any other encounters with Islam , Muslims or the Middle East in general . During a break-up with a boyfriend of mine at that time , I met a Kuwaiti guy at the gym I had been going to . It was fairly innocent , as my personal trainer introduced him to me . I thought he was handsome and friendly , but he seemed too good to be true and I automatically labelled him as a player . When I found out he

was Muslim , I became even more turned off . Even though I had more knowledge about Islam at that time than most Americans , I was still blinded by my prejudices.

After a little coercion , I finally agreed to eat falafels with him at a local Arabic grocery store granted it was a �friendly� meeting and not a romantic one . I thought he was �nice� , but he was not GQ enough for my liking . My shallowness inhibited me from seeing his truly caring , unselfish and respectful attitude . We slowly became friends over a few months period and he found his way into my heart . He was always there for me emotionally and spiritually while I coped with my financial difficulties and rocky relationship with my mother and sister . His number one interest was always making my life easier and not complicating it with frivolous temptations and desires.

He slowly introduced me to the concepts of Islam and stories of Prophet Muhammad (SWA) . He even prayed in front of me until I felt comfortable to talk openly about my misconceptions of Islam , especially the role of women . Everything that he related to me , I saw in the actions of him , his brothers and their friends . I began to realize that all the time I spent worried about partying , drinking and hanging out with my supposed �guy friends� was all a waste . None of these things were going to get

me any closer to feeling truly happy about myself and about life as a whole . � . . . As [for the life of this world , it is nothing but a merchandise of vanity� [Al-Qur�an ٣ : ١٨٥ .

It might be very difficult for non-believers to accept that I chose Islam and was not forced to or persuaded to by �man from Kuwait� . My acceptance of Islam was not a prerequisite of our relationship�s potential future , as some have thought . I did not automatically adhere to anything or believe everything I heard or read . It was a slow process of learning and �man from Kuwait� was perfect about telling me the right thing at the right time . He never started out by telling me what was haram (forbidden) and the punishments for that on Judgement Day . On the contrary , he first explained to me why he did what he did . What was the spiritual significance of Hajj , praying at certain times , refraining from the consumption of pork , etc ? Every tradition in Islam (submission to God) prescribed by Allah has significance; it is not mere cultural .customs passed down from generation to generation

Some of the hardest things for me to accept included Islamic attire for men and women , Polygamy , prohibition of alcohol , etc . Not to mention I wanted proof . . . logical proof and reasoning to understand why �man from Kuwait� felt obligated to , pray

fast , abstain from drinking and sex , etc . At first I saw it as so many �don�ts� and so few �dos� . Some of these topics required a lot of in-depth discussion , so �man from Kuwait� turned me to Ahmed Deedat to pick up where he left off . The acceptance of Islam , the belief in Al-Qur�an and Allah as Creator of everything was a natural concept and Deedat reasoned this to death in my mind . I tried to logically !refute these ideas internally , but I couldn�t . It was simply not possible

part ٢

My hardest internal struggle was revealing these ideas to my parents and family . What would they think ? Would they disinherit me ? How could I tell them ? Well , the truth of the matter is that I am in the process of this right now . The stronger my faith becomes , the less worried I am about what non-believers think . The number one idea I have to rid my family of is the incorrect belief that women have a subservient role to men in Islam . From an American perspective , these ideas are easily confused with reality , especially since many Muslim countries have gone astray in inhibiting .women an education or right to work

I always relate the story of the Prophet�s first wife , Khadija . She was a rich woman who not only owned her own business , but also successfully raised her children . So

many seem to skip over this fact , and Muslims alike . People also forget or misunderstand the acceptance of polygamy . This is not a preferred way of life according to Allah�s word , but an option . Al-Qur�an reiterates this , by stating that it is impossible to treat multiple wives equally , so unless you can , then just marry one woman . Before I understood Islam , I always assumed that multiple wives was the suggested way of life according to the teachings of Islam , and relying on media influence made me blind to the truth . What really hit it home for me was that the Prophet (SWA) was married to a much older woman for ٢٥ years , and it wasn�t until after she died that he re-married . He was allowed more than four wives in order to teach people how to treat different wives , whether much older , much younger , Jewish or Christian . He showed us that marrying women of other heavenly religions was accepted and that marrying women of other ethnicities or ages was good in the eyes of God . Far too many people today , refuse to marry women of different colors and cultures . Prophet Muhammad (SWA) showed us that these prejudices should be avoided . Furthermore , he married a couple of these women because their husbands had died in war , and he wanted to provide means and a father figure for their children . It was

not based on sexual desires . In fact , Islam prohibited the conduct of many men (Christian and Jewish) of that time who had hundreds of wives and concubines , thus the max Islam allows is four and that having relations with someone other than your wife is considered adultery . I have even read in history books (written by non-Muslims) that the reason the Catholic Church outlawed multiple wives , was because men did not want to be legally responsible financially for providing for more than one . This allowed more free conduct on the part of men to gallivant with women outside of the marriage and not be tied down buy so many legitimate children.

Differentiating between the true faith of Islam and the wrong doings of people , whose actions do not reflect Islam , can prove difficult , especially to non-believers . Many people throughout time whether Christian , Jewish or Muslim have tried to base their anti-religious actions on the supposed teachings of that faith . This factor in accepting Islam influenced me in taking more time to believe . Every time I heard or read about some questionable act that a Muslim had committed , I immediately ran to my Muslim friends for proof explaining or denying the correctness of that action . �man from Kuwait� always shows me Quranic proof for such actions or against them.

I still remember all the times people have said , �Haven�t you seen the movie Not Without My Daughter ? � How

ignorant for someone to base his or her beliefs of another culture or religion on an American made movie . This is precisely why so many non-Muslims have negative stereotypes about Islam . When I first introduced my parents to �man from Kuwait� , there was a lot of turmoil in the family . I remember all the questions : is �man from Kuwait� going to have a harem of wives , what if he steals your children , what if you move to Kuwait and they hold you captive , etc ? It took so much explaining to even justify why I was interested in a Muslim man , let alone explaining to them why I have become Muslim . Insha�Allah (God willing) Islam will bring me closer to my family as I have seen it helping me mend my friendship with my sister . She has been Christian for years , and now that I believe in one God , Allah , we many times have religious and spiritual discussions about God . It seems we have more in common now , then ever before.

After about a year of knowing each other , I really started to believe all that I heard and read about this great deen (religion) . Even though I had not uttered the words , �Esheduana la illaha ilallah� , I believed that there was no other deity except for Allah , and without a doubt that Prophet Muhammad (SWA) was the messenger of Allah (Esheduana Muhammadan rasool

Allah) . It was not until about six months later that I finished reading Volume one of �The Choice : Islam and Christianity� by Ahmed Deedat . I had never read anything more convincing that was directed toward an American point of view . I immediately asked �man from Kuwait� how I actually could become Muslim . Was there a ceremony or did I have to make a blood oath ? I was surprised that all I had to do was utter those words and truly believe it in my heart that there is no other deity except Allah and that Prophet Muhammad was the messenger of Allah . How simple . . . and .simply beautiful

Sometimes , I have small insignificant doubts , but they quickly pass . I just remember that it is probably the Shetan (devil) trying to influence me , like when your mind wonders during prayer . I still believe , and I have never thought that I chose Islam because of my interest in �man from Kuwait� . I told my mother that even if he .disappears tomorrow , I will remain Muslimah - Insha�Allah until I die

My friends and co-workers have been extremely supportive and respect my choice not to drink , eat pork , etc . I have even taught Islam to some of my co-workers . Many of my friends usually ask my opinion on their life controversies and hardships . I always give them Islamic advice , and they appreciate that . My

roommate is not Muslim , yet she respects my beliefs and does not drink around me or try to force me to go bar hopping with her and her friends . What my friends think never influences me to change my opinions or beliefs . I listen to other peoples� .perspectives , but I am Muslimah and Insha�Allah that will not change

Becoming Muslim was the best choice that I ever made and I thank Allah everyday that he gave me the openness in my heart to accept it and love it . I have read and learned from various people so much about this deen and it seems that I just cannot learn enough . I continually search for more proof of Islam and take every opportunity .to teach others about it

I have faith in the Hereafter and realize that no matter what others say or think their blindness will not hinder nor help me on the Day of Judgement . Allah does not accept excuses like �I did not know any better� or �I do not believe in Islam because my parents were Christian� . If these excuses worked than the people of Mecca would have gone on worshipping idols like their forefathers had and not have embraced Islam with the Prophet (SWA) . �Do the unbelievers think they can make My own .[creatures their protectors against Me ? � [Al-Qur�an ١٨ : ١٠٢

Insha�Allah one day , Allah will let the light of Islam into the hearts of my parents and

sister . �It is true thou wilt not be able to guide every one , whom thou lovest; but Allah guides those whom He will and He knows best those who receive guidance� [Al-Qur�an ٢٨ : ٥٦] . Everyday , I think about the blazing fire that awaits those that do not believe and my eyes fill with tears of horror for those close to me who do not understand the signs that Allah has made clear for all of us . I never question that which He has made nor the reasons why He has lead me to Islam and not my family . I just pray that Allah will lead them as well . �Creation of the heavens and the earth , alternation of night and day , and sailing of ships across the ocean with what is useful to man , and the rain that Allah sends from the sky enlivening the earth that was dead , and the scattering of beasts of all kinds upon it , and the changing of the winds , and the clouds which remain obedient between earth and sky , are surely signs for the wise . And yet there are men who take others as compeers of Allah , and bestow on them love due to Allah; but the love of the faithful for Allah is more intense . If only the wicked could see now the agony that they will behold (on the Day of Resurrection) , they will know that to Allah belongs

. [the power entirely ! And the punishment of Allah is severe� [Al-Qur�an ٢ : ١۶۴-١۶۵

Holy Quran ٢٨ : ٣٧

And Musa said : My Lord knows best who comes with guidance from Him , and whose . shall be the good end of the abode; surely the unjust shall not be successful

KARIMA

Eight years ago I met my former husband in North Africa . We fell in love and decided to live together in Holland . He is Muslim but I did not really see him practising anything except for Ramadan . I wanted to marry him and have children together . I understand Muslims want to bring up their children in an Islamic way so I started to read about Islam . I found it important to know much about this religion so I also did Ramadan together with my husband . In this time I also took some Arabic lessons , . the teacher had a lot of knowledge about Islam so I could ask him a lot of questions

I still was afraid about Islam , Dutch people believe Islam is a violent religion . But the more I read about it the more I felt good about it . I was brought up Catholic , go to church at least one time every week and do a lot of things inside of the church . However the last years I have not felt at my place in the Catholic religion , it seemed old fashioned and far away from my normal life

In Islam I found answers to the questions of my daily life . For me it is a more . practical and modern religion

When my husband finally wanted to marry (this was more because otherwise we couldn�t stay in a hotel in his country together than for something else) I also . decided to do the Shahada

I didn�t know before they would ask me some questions and I was surprised by the question : Do you think Jesus is the son of God ? Of course not , I never believed that this is symbolic , it means you are close to God because you are a prophet . I never . see this literally

After three years our marriage ended and there I was a Dutch Muslim woman alone . How I can be a good Muslim with only a few Muslim girlfriends around ? How I can find a good Muslim husband ? Why I decided to become Muslim ? Why I not just marry a ? nice Dutch man , Muslim or not Muslim

This was a very difficult time in which I prayed a lot . And I feel I get support from God , I feel I decided for myself to become Muslim not for my husband . Now I see this time as a test of my religion , I am very happy , I search for support in praying to God . because he gives me answers

Not long after this I found a new husband . A man who

is very serious about Islam . Who , like me , still needs to learn a lot but who also can help and support me and live with me in an Islamic way . He gives me new energy to study more about Islam.

I always say religion is something in which you believe , you shouldn�t need to ask for proof because then it is not religion but a fact . But God is everywhere and he support me in my life , I had some difficult times but he never gave me more then I can handle . I have one other very strong example in which God directly communicated with me:

After five months of pregnancy our baby died , the doctors couldn�t hear any heartbeat and they sent me home to come back two days later for the delivery . I didn�t want to loose our baby , I thought it was better he stayed inside me , dead or alive , this is our baby nobody can touch him . I talk about him because I was sure it was a boy , I never see myself with a baby daughter . In these difficult days I prayed a lot , in one of these prayers I suddenly saw a girl about ۴ years old playing on a green hill (like in the Teletubbies) and I am sure this is our daughter . She was very beautiful and happily playing . Then I heard or understand there is somebody behind

the hill , an old man , I did not see but feel this . This man told me I shouldn�t worry he would take care of our daughter . After this I was not stressed anymore for the delivery , already our daughter was with God . It makes me feel quiet . After the delivery I was not surprised our baby was a girl , already I was sure for this.

In this relatively short time I am a practising Muslim I have three moments in which God directly helped me . Although my daily life can be very busy and stressful I know I can give everything in the hands of God , Islam.

Holy Quran ۳۱ : ۳

A guidance and a mercy for the doers of goodness.

SHEZREEN MUBARAK

What moved me to embrace Islam

My family are Roman Catholic but my mother doesn�t practise as she felt oppressed by it as a child in school . So she never got me christened but she planned to get me christened as a Protestant . . . I believed in God and I had a go at reading the Bible and listened to the stories at school (I went to a mixed school; not one of those strict Catholic ones with the statues etc like my mum went to) but I was never settled and I always wanted to be something else . In school I wasn�t accepted by the �popular� group and I always tried to be individual and different , on the

whole I felt confused and I hated myself . We had religious education lessons in school but we were never taught the truth , we were taught that Islam was a religion for Asian people and the Bible is our book and the Qur�an is theirs . Still I enjoyed the Islamic parts more than the others . Then when I was only thirteen , I started a pen friendship with a boy in Pakistan , he was nineteen and Muslim and my mother wasn�t to keen on the idea as I was very young at the time and she was worried that because he was Muslim , he might be pushy about his religion in the same way the people were in her school . But I saw that he was so different and so polite , he showed me that Islam wasn�t just a religion for Asian and Black people (like they said in school) , it was a religion for everybody , and slowly I started changing my ways (eating , dressing etc) and Alhamdulillah when I was sixteen she gave us permission to get married , I did the Shahada then too and now I�m happy with my life , I don�t feel sad and confused anymore and I don�t hate myself now . When I reverted , I didn�t know much about Islam , and even though I learned more afterwards , I never came across anything that I�m not happy with or not sure about . Islam is the

perfect way of life . Once a man who reverted to Islam was on TV and he said that when you become Muslim , you get a feeling that you have �come home� , and I really agree with that . Now my mother is happy about me becoming a Muslim , she was against it at first but after we went to Pakistan and met his family she started getting used to it . She didn�t become a Muslim though , Insha Allah one day.

Holy Quran ۴۰ : ۵۴

A guidance and a reminder to the men of understanding.

MARYAM

In the Name of God , the Merciful , the Compassionate!

My Journey to Allah

I always feel somewhat tongue-tied whenever anyone asks me why or how I ended up embracing the religion of Islam . How do you fit a life-time of seeking God into a few sentences ? The most truthful answer I can give is that I believe God has called me to Him and asked me to follow His Messenger Muhammad , may the peace and blessings of God be upon him.

I was born in Melbourne and raised in a Baha�i family; my parents both converts to a religion which originally began as a breakaway Islamic revival sect before evolving into an independent religious movement . I grew up believing in God and wanting to make the world a better place . This was the beginning of my Muslim journey , even if I didn�t know it back then.

Conversion

I once read , is not a single event : it�s a lifetime process . It has peaks and troughs , , leaps forward and steps backward . There may have been a moment when I first became conscious of my duty to submit to God and follow His Messenger , but my first . tender steps towards my Beloved Creator began way before my adulthood

As a teenager I was an active Baha�i , I prayed and fasted regularly and kept to a fairly strict code of personal morality . I was a normal teenager , of course , and enjoyed going to the movies and gossiping on the phone with my girlfriends . But I also did volunteer work within the religious organisation , and it was during my �youth year of service� that I experienced a brief lifting of the veil in what seemed like an amazing burst of other-worldly love . During an intense prayer session in which I had devoted my life to God , He grasped my soul and gently flooded me with His . tender loving mercy

I developed an intense urge to study Arabic and enrolled in a course the next year . This brought me into contact with Muslims and I quickly became interested in the religion �behind� the language . As a Baha�i I believed that the Prophet Muhammad was sent by God , and that the Qur�an was His Word , but now I began to learn what Muslims themselves had to say about their religion

Instead of Islam being a legalistic religion encrusted with outdated rules and . regulations , I began to see it as a living faith with the ability to spiritually enrich the lives of those who truly sought to implement it . One of my teachers had a quiet humility for which I longed . Through him , by the will of the All-Merciful , I began to see Islam as a peaceful , beautiful and gentle religion . My inner world was thrown into turmoil as I began to contemplate leaving the religion of my parents and heeding the . inner call of God

It took me a number of years to finally come to terms with the reality that I wanted to be a Muslim , during which I developed a mental depression which brought me to the edge of the abyss . A great Muslim called al-Ghazali once wrote that depression is one method that the Beloved chooses to bring His servants to Him , and for me this was true . Becoming conscious of my calling to Islam meant alienating myself from my perplexed family , struggling with the collective sins of a less-than-perfect Muslim community , and finding my spiritual feet like a new baby . It was a humbling experience : I went from being a knowledgeable Baha�i , active in the religion�s organisational structure , to being shown how to wash myself and pray . More than once I faltered in my new baby steps and fled to the safety

of the comfortable old world that I knew . I even rejoined the Baha�i organisation , . after quitting it for a year , but could not make myself feel happy there

Finally , three years ago , I surrendered myself to God and accepted Islam as my religion . I took the scarf as a symbol of my Muslim identity and from that point on began to implement the teachings of the Qur�an and my beloved Prophet Muhammad in my life . In answer to a half-spoken prayer , God filled my life with wonderful sisters and brothers who help me walk along this path : He is the Generous ! I still struggle with the trials of life , but feel I have found my spiritual home and a . Muslim community which provides me with the opportunity to give a little of myself

! All praise be to God , the Lord of all the worlds

Holy Quran ۴۷ : ۱۷

And (as for) those who follow the right direction , He increases them in guidance and . (gives them their guarding (against evil

IBRAHIM

A time comes in everyone�s life , or at least I hope it comes , when they realize that they have to not only believe what they believe in , whatever it may be , but get out there and proclaim it to the world . Luckily , that time came early for me . I am ۱۷ , and . Islam is the belief that I�m proclaiming

. I was raised Catholic

Not internally as much as externally . I went to Catholic Sunday school , called CCD , but the Catholic view of God never played a major roll in my childhood . It was a Sunday thing . Anyhow , I started to enjoy Mass around ٧th grade . It made me feel good to do the right thing . I was always a rather moral person , but I never really studied the fundamentals of Catholicism . I just knew that I felt good worshipping my .creator

I really liked Catholicism , but I always saw it as us (the Catholics) with Jesus worshipping God , not us worshipping God and Jesus as one . I saw Jesus (peace be upon him) as my example on how to be a good follower of and submitter to God�s .will , but not as God himself

Before I was confirmed in ٨th grade , in the fall of ١٩٩٩ , I learned a lot about what Catholicism was . The Catholicism of the Church had a lot on viewing Jesus as God in it . Nothing like my �undivided God being worshipped by me with Jesus as an example� train of thought . It was like they just opened up a can of cold , illogical .confusion and tried to feed it to me . It didn�t feel right

I continued with the Catholic church , and kept on worshipping . But I talked to many in the church about my feelings that Jesus wasn�t God

but more of a Prophet , an example . They told me that I had to accept him as God and as a sacrifice , and so on . I just wasn�t buying it . I tried to buy it but I guess God withhold the sale for my own benefit . There was a better car out there for me . I continued at the church.

Sometime in mid-December of ١٩٩٩ , for no reason that I can recall I started reading up on Islam in encyclopedias . I remember making a list of bolded words in the entry for �Islam� in an old ١٩٦٤ Grolier World Book that I found in my closet , and studying them . For some reason I was amazed by this faith and that it was all about God and that it was everything that I believed all my life - right here . Previously , I had accepted that there was no faith like I felt inside of me . But I was amazed that I had found this faith . I found out that �my� faith had a name , and millions of other adherents!

Without ever reading a Qur�an or talking to another Muslim , I said shahada (declaring your belief in no god but God) on ٣١ December ١٩٩٩ . As the months passed , I learned more . I went through many periods of confusion , happiness , doubt and amazement . Islam took me on an enlightening tour of me , everyone

. else , and God

The transition was slow . I was still attending Mass five months into my change of faith . Each time I went , I felt more and more distant from the congregation , but . closer and closer to Prophet Jesus and God

During Ramadan ٢٠٠١ , the second time I fasted (the first year , I converted during Ramadan and did not fast) , I went to the library during lunch period . It was better than sitting at a table with my friends , because I got work done in the library . I swear my grades went up . I started talking to the only other Muslim at my school , John . We talked about Islam a little more each day . He�s an awesome brother and he took me to the mosque on the last Friday of Ramadan . Going was one of the best decisions I ever made in my life . God really answered my prayers this time . I thought I would be nervous , but I wasn�t at all . It was the most natural thing I ever did in my life . I felt home . I realized something before leaving . As I sat there on the floor , praying to God , I realized that the room was full of others but it was OK . See , at home when someone asks me what I am doing , I never say I am praying . I never admit it

to anyone . It is too awkward . But there , at the masjid , I was praying to God in front of a score of other Muslims and I felt perfectly fine . Better than fine ! I felt natural and safe . It was the most liberating thing since I accepted God into my heart that cold . New Year�s Eve almost two years ago

I never told my parents right out . In fact , I don�t plan to . The most significant clue that I gave came around ۱ : ۰۰ AM on ۱۶ December ۲۰۰۱ , when I finally told my dad I was going to the mosque in the morning with a friend when he asked me why I was setting my alarm . He chewed me out , to say the least . I never told them straight out because I figured it was best to test the waters by revealing clues bit by bit; I didn�t want to send a shockwave through the family . I can only imagine what my dad would do if he knew I was actually a practicing Muslim . I understand that my dad is a depressed man , so I don�t really hold this all against him . I mean , it is his fault for thinking himself so smart that he doesn�t need God . That thought is what got him so depressed . But I don�t think he realized how hard one�s heart can be when you deny your human

need for a relationship with your Creator . So I don�t hold it all against him . He didn�t know what he was getting into . My mom doesn�t know that I am a Muslim , but at least she hasn�t shown her anger over me going to the mosque . As God commands , I�ll continue to try my best to be nice to my parents as long as they don�t attempt to take away my Islam . The best thing that I can do for them is to be a good example so that maybe one day , inshallah , they can see that there is a better . way of living than living in the dark world of God-denial

I�ve never been to the Mid-East , but I am studying Islam every day . I read books from every point of view . Sufi , Shia , Sunni , books on the Qur�an alone . . . The Muslims view sects as haram , so no matter what you believe you are always a Muslim and nothing extra . You may have completely different views than another Muslim , but as long as you both believe that there is no god but God , you are both Muslims and that�s that . I read a lot on-line , and discuss a lot with other Muslims on-line and on the phone . I�ve met some really great people on-line who have taught me a lot . about life , Islam and God

, Right now

I am ١٠٠٪ a Muslim and that will never change , inshallah . I thank God that I�ve gone through so many periods of doubt . When I look back I see that it was not God leaving me but God telling me that it was time that I asked myself how much I loved God , and what I was willing to go through to understand my faith . A week of crying , depression , prayer , reading to the extreme , and ignoring most other things in life sounds harsh . . . but the reward – knowing so much more about yourself , God , and the relationship between you (Islam) – is worth more than any material things . Through my interrogation of Islam I gained God�s most precious gift – Islam , or surrender to the peace . I�ve heard Christians say that with Christianity you �know God on a personal level . � In Islam , your relationship with God is so much deeper than that . God is with me every moment , guiding me , teaching me , loving me , protecting me , liberating me , enlightening me , comforting me . . . Alhamdulilah for Islam !

Islam has done a lot for me . More than I could have ever guessed . And every day , it just gets better . At first it was like Allah was turning on lights where it was dark . Now , He is shining light into places

that I never KNEW were dark ! It is just total enlightenment and consolation at the same time I feel like I�m getting the warmest , truest hug . I went from living my life on a trial-and-error basis to embracing guidance , and now knowing what the best choices are for me to make . From seeking who I am and spending a life in confusion , I am being guided . I can�t find the words to say what its like , but I�ll try again : God . reveals to me what life is . I don�t have to guess anymore

�Sura ٩٣ , �The Morning Hours

By the morning hours

By the night when it is still

Your lord has not abandoned you

and does not hate you

What is after will be better

than what came before

To you the lord will be giving

You will be content

Did he not find you orphaned and give you shelter

Find you lost and guide you

Find you in hunger and provide for you

As for the orphan , do not oppress him

And one who asks , do not turn him away

And the grace of your lord -- proclaim

That is what I went through , what God did for me - what I am . So here is my

proclamation to the world . Islam is more than you think it is , in fact more liberal than most would wish it to be . But do not only listen . Study all views for yourself . . . and come to your own conclusion

God says �let there be no compulsion in religion� because faith in God is a choice . made by the heart , and it can�t be forced .

Holy Quran ۲ : ۱۸۵

The month of Ramazan is that in which the Quran was revealed , a guidance to men and clear proofs of the guidance and the distinction�

FROM IGNORANCE TO ISLAM

My upbringing did not really include anything about God . I was christened , although I am not sure why , I would guess that this happened as it was the �done thing� in my family . In addition I have vague memories of going to Sunday school , and of course the religious education later at school , which could be re-named �Christian education� as no other religions ever got a look in .

Without any firm religious values , I lived my life according to my own set of moral values . Basically I just used to drift from one point of view to the next , and do my best to �fit in� with whichever group of people I was with . I did have a belief in God , although I have to admit that I did not do a lot about it . ,

Then I met a Muslim . This opened new channels of discussions , and re-kindled the flame of my belief in God . Many a conversation took place on all sorts of topics , the existence of God , Heaven and Hell , other religions , the Holy Prophet and his Family

PBUT , even topics such as what was the point of dinosaurs , and aliens . Everything was a muddle in my mind , question after question I asked , and to each question there was an answer that satisfied it . I was confused though , if this religion was so correct , why hadn�t I heard about it already ? What about all the kind people I had met that were not Muslims , surely their good deeds would count ? Why do you have to become a Muslim if you live your life properly , i . e . do not steal , commit adultery ? . etc . etc

As time passed I soon realised that I was just searching for excuses . I knew that Islam was correct , but I needed to dig deep to find the courage to change . No longer could I hide behind a wall of questions and �what ifs� , it was time to stand up and . be part of something that I believed in

I was very nervous , every few minutes my stomach churned , rushes of adrenal waves through my body . It was the night that I would declare myself a Muslim and change the rest of my life . I was sure about my decision to revert , but scared at the prospect at the same time , conflicting emotions and feelings taking it in turns to pop into my head , but all along I knew that Truth would

. win

The time had come , we gathered in a group . I repeated everything that the Imam said to me , I hung onto every syllable and repeated as best I could , I was afraid that if I didn�t pronounce the Arabic words properly then my declaration would not count , and it had to count . I went into a kind of dream world , feeling as if this wasn�t really me , I was watching someone else . The emotions started to rise , I looked around and realised that I was not alone with my tears . My declaration was touching the hearts of those around me . The Imam then said a number of prayers for me and also for my family , I felt somehow indebted to him , I felt the need to repay him in . some way for what he had enabled me to become

Tears continued to roll as this pious Imam asked me to pray for him that night . How could one of my prayers be worth anything when compared to his ? We shared a cup of water , I was allowed to drink first , followed by all my good friends , and I was now . part of what they stood for . I had been accepted

From that point onwards I was a Muslim , not only had this been witnessed by those around me , but also by all the Prophets PBUT , who I was told grace every

. declaration with their presence . I felt so honoured that I could hardly believe it

The final part of the transformation was to wash . I needed to purify myself and all my sins would now be forgiven , as if they had been washed down the plughole with the . soapy water . It was as if I had just been born; from now on it would be up to me

The world now appeared differently to me . I noticed aspects of people that I had missed before , I was much more aware of good and evil around me . I could look back at my past and it really felt as if that wasn�t me at all , I had a feeling that I had been given a whole new life , and I had been detached from my previous actions . This carried with it a responsibility , a desire not to blemish my new clean record . I had so much to learn , so much to read and take in . I had to be different towards people at work and even my own family , I had to get rid of clothes , books and pictures , now . that I had been purified I had to make an attempt to purify my surroundings

With the help I have had from Allah SWT , I have now found the true path , and take the Holy Prophet and his Family PBUT as my examples to follow , I must

try and remember them with my every thought . My only wish now is that they may . remember me on the Day of Judgement

www . ConvertsToIslam . com

Holy Quran ٢ : ٣٨

We Said : Go forth from this (state) all; So surely there will come to you guidance from Me , then whoever follows My guidance , no fear shall come upon them , nor shall they . grieve

HEATHER OLMSTEAD

My Journey to Allah

I am a new Muslimah . I took shahada on August ١٥ , ٢٠٠٢ . I am so glad I did . Life is much better with Islam . I had been searching all my life for a way to Allah . I was raised Christian . I explored many different faiths looking for Truth and guidance . . Now I have found it

First of all , a bit of background about me . I was born and mostly raised in Wisconsin in the United States . When I was born , my parents belonged to the Quakers . So that was my first experience with religion . The Quakers are very open-minded , so I was exposed to many different people and faiths . I was raised with very few prejudices . My parents divorced when I was ٩ years old . I think due to the divorce , my parents both began going through some sort of spiritual crisis . Every weekend my brother and I alternated which parent we were with . Due to their searching , we went

. to many different churches , all Protestant Christian

My mother brought us to a group of Pentecostals , where they spoke in tongues (an angelic language believed to be sent through them by God) and healed people by praying . I remember having to stand on the chairs to see over all the people to catch . the action

My father brought us to a Congregational church (the exact opposite of the Pentecostals) , a Dutch Reformed (where my new step-mother went) , and a group of . divorced Christians that met for worship

Eventually my mother worked her way back to the church of her childhood . The Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod . For any of you that know anything about Lutherans , these guys are the strictest . They aren�t allowed to pray with anyone besides other Wisconsin Synod Lutherans , even other Christians , because they do not believe the same . I personally believe they are near cult status (though I would (! never say that in front of my grandmother

In that church I went through Catechism classes (where you are taught , once a week after school for three years , what the Church teaches) and was confirmed . (graduation) . But it all never added up for me . I was still searching

In high school I made friends with other Christians who actually observed their faith (where I am from , everyone is Christian , they just don�t necessarily practice it) . We met for Bible study and on weekends

visited various churches . I studied every denomination I could looking for the Truth . Baptist , Pentecostal , Assembly of God , Unitarian , Methodist , Non-denominational , Snake handlers , World Wide Church of God , Shakers , Amish , Presbyterian , United Church of Christ . And the list goes on . I have either studied and met a member and/or . attended worship in all of these (and more) denominations

Then I found the Catholics . I was convinced I wanted to be a nun . I even went through the conversion classes . But something stopped me before I officially . converted

In college I was a Theology major with an emphasis in Comparative Religions . I made studying religions my life , not just my hobby . The more I studied , the more holes I . found

I went on and started to search outside of Christianity . I studied and/or practiced Hinduism , Buddhism , Taoism , Neo-paganism , Witchcraft , Voodoo , Santeria , Ba�haism and Judaism . About the only thing I have stayed away from was Satanism !

How I found Islam is a miracle brought about by the horrible tragedy of Sept . ١١ . Before then , I thought , as many still do , that Islam was a controlling , misogynistic , violent religion . In all my religious studies , I hadn�t spent any more time on it then . needed for my theology classes in college

Though it still seems that the media doesn�t

portray us in the kindest light , news reports and articles did begin to open my mind to . a new way of thinking about Islam

In a conversation with my mother-in-law , we began to discuss Islam . She made the comment �All Muslims , by the very nature of their religion , are violent� . Let me say , and I say this as fact , not as insult , that she is a very closed-minded person and does not educate herself on religions outside her narrow view of Protestant Christianity . So when she made the comment , I didn�t believe what she said . But it did occur to me , that I was unable to agree or disagree based on any knowledge that I personally had . I felt the need to change that . In classes in college I had learned the Five Pillars , and that Muslims prayed toward Mecca because Muhammad was from (? there (textbooks don�t have to be correct do they

Soon after I had the chance to receive some free pamphlets about Islam from a web-site (www . whyIslam . org) . I sent for them , thinking that if we were going to be at . war with these people , I should know something about them

The pamphlets came . I read them and was amazed . This religion was nothing like what I had previously thought ! A volunteer from the web-site e-mailed me and offered me an English translation of the Qur�an

I thought �Why not ? � I had read the Bible , some of the Hindu Vedas , much of the . Talmud , and the Book of Mormon . So in the interest of education , I accepted the .offer

When the book came , I found that he had generously sent me two other books . An Illustrated Guide to Islam and Towards Understanding Islam . I read them first . Then I began the Meaning of the Qur�an . It was if scales had fallen off my eyes , and off .of my heart . I felt in my heart that I had found how to please God

I promised myself I would not take shahada until I had read the entire Qur�an . Even though I spent hours studying other aspects of Islam on the internet . There was nothing that I learned that turned me off the faith . Instead , there were so many ideas that I had believed already . It was as if Allah had been leading me to Islam all of .my life

I prayed . I searched my heart . I tried to think of some excuse why I couldn�t convert to Islam . I thought about how my family and friends would take it . I thought about how hard it would be to wear hijab around here (and I felt that wearing hijab was fard) . No matter what excuse I came up with , I knew they didn�t matter . Allah was

. calling me

On the evening of August ١٥ , ٢٠٠٢ I repeated after my internet friend , �La ilaha illa Allah Muhammadur rasoolu Allah (There is no true god but God , and Muhammad is the Messenger of God)� . I was Muslim . I felt great ! Now I had to break the news to . my husband

I actually hadn�t expected to convert so quickly . But when something is right , it . happens

I told my husband and he was supportive . We had some difficulty over the next couple weeks , but we worked it out . He was just worried about me . Worried about violence from people because of ٩/١١ . Worried I was on an emotional high and would come down and feel I had made a mistake . He had watched me explore many other religions over the course of our marriage . He was afraid this was another of my �phases� . Of course , he didn�t say this all so bluntly . He was very kind and . considerate

I haven�t been a Muslim that long yet . Maybe this is another phase . But is that any excuse not to follow Allah ? I had read an article on excuses of why women don�t wear hijab . One was because they were worried they would take it off at some later point and then would cause more harm then good . The response was that you cannot predict the future . Maybe you will take off

? your scarf . Maybe you wouldn�t . Is that any reason not to wear it now

So I feel the same about being Muslim . Maybe someday I will fall away . I pray not . ? But is that any reason to not follow Allah today

Holy Quran ٧ : ٢٠٣

And when you bring them not a revelation they say : Why do you not forge it ? Say : I only follow what is revealed to me from my Lord; these are clear proofs from your . Lord and a guidance and a mercy for a people who believe

BROTHER YAHYA

Donald Flood : An American English Language Instructor

Every culture has its own strengths and weaknesses . It is well known that American life as a considerable amount of personal freedom . So much so that many parents give a long rope to their children . They generally do not interfere in religious matters and in the personal pursuits of their children . As such , the personal activities of parents and children tend to be mutually accepted and respected . Don was the . product of one such liberal home . He related his life story to me as follows

My Religious Background

My religious background was as a typical American . I was a Christian and occasionally attended church with my family when I was growing up . It appeared that morality was the most important thing in Christianity . My lack of Christian knowledge and . practice helped me to keep an open mind for other religions and cultures

Experience with New Cultures

There is lot of mobility in American life . My father moved from place to place to follow his professional job . Fortunately , we had the chance to live in Latin America for several months when I was a high school student . I encountered a new culture and language there . I fully comprehended that there were other lifestyles in the world , not just the American lifestyle . This experience broadened my mind and outlook . I

was , therefore , curious to know more and more about other cultures and languages . I returned back to America with my family and completed my high school in Indiana . Thereafter , I joined the University of Texas in El Paso , which is on the border of Texas and Mexico , as a Business Administration major .

Camping Trip

After a few years of study , I knew that this major was not for me . I felt I needed something more interesting and cultural . It was during this time that a friend invited me to go with him on a three-month camping trip all over the USA and Western Canada . I cheerfully accepted because I knew this experience in the marvels of nature would be an appropriate setting to reflect upon personal goals and objectives . As a result of this experience , I didn�t arrive at any decisions regarding my academic pursuits , but I did realize that this world could not have been created by mistake , and that

it was clearly a wonderland of signs pointing to its Creator . I was , however , not sure . how to worship or appreciate our Creator

Then one day while sunbathing , I suddenly realized that I could combine my interests in business and culture by majoring in Latin American Studies . I went back to the . university at the beginning of the next academic year and transferred to this major

Social Activities

While back in the university , my Hindu friend invited me , along with his Saudi friend , to a church gathering , which included sports activities and a home-cooked meal . As a student , you do take advantage of every opportunity for a home-cooked meal . The dinner was very sumptuous . At the end of the evening something unexpected happened . The leader of the

church started singing a song scribbled on the blackboard in Hebrew . He wanted us to repeat it after him . We noticed that our Saudi friend , Abu Hussein , suddenly stood up and asked us to leave the gathering with him . The host tried to persuade us to stay , but we hurriedly left the church . Ironically , this incident made us closer friends . A few weeks later Abu Hussein and I decided to rent a house together , along with a . student from Kuwait and one from Iran

This new living arrangement provided me with a closer interaction with their cultures . I loved their meals and tried to prepare

some of them . I noticed that my housemates often liked to eat with their right hand without the use of silverware . They also preferred sitting down on the floor to eat instead of sitting at a table . I did not know why they took a pitcher of water with them to the toilet for cleaning purposes . I also noticed that they offered their guests unparalleled hospitality . Regarding their character , I was impressed with their high level of self-confidence , which seemed to stem from some special kind of certainty about what they were doing and where they were going in life . I understood later that most of these mannerisms were according to the teachings of Islam and not .necessarily cultural behavior

By partially experiencing both the Latin American and Arab cultures , I observed many distinct similarities . Moreover , these findings were confirmed through my university studies on Latin America . I learned this affinity resulted from the ٨٠٠-year influence of the Islamic civilization on Spain and medieval Europe . Thus , through their historical bond with the Arabs , some Islamic practices continue to be part of the Latin American .culture of today

Overseas Trip

After graduation , my housemates went back to their respective countries . I remained in touch with Abu Hussein . One year after our graduation he invited me to visit Saudi Arabia for two weeks . I accepted his invitation and travelled to Saudi Arabia where I was received like a king

I spent most of the time in a village situated a few hours south of Riyadh . I came . across a very different lifestyle . I slept in an open space under the stars on big . beautiful red carpets

Abu Hussein sacrificed several sheep and invited all the villagers for a dinner . I never had attention like this in my whole life and we were mutually appreciative of each other . One evening after dinner , we went out to the desert to look at their camels . One of the boys milked a camel and offered me some of this fresh milk . After drinking some , I commented that this camel milk was absolutely delicious . Then Abu Hussein�s father said to me , �If you become a Muslim , I shall give you ten camels . � I responded promptly , �If you become a Christian , I shall give you ten camels . � After briefly experiencing life in the desert of Saudi Arabia , I returned back to . America

My New Career

After working for two years as a marketing representative for a publishing company in America , I found a job as an English foreign language instructor in Abu Dhabi , UAE . I really enjoyed this kind of work . I decided that teaching English as a foreign language would be my career from then on . Moreover , this two-year experience provided me with more exposure to Arab culture . As with my former Muslim , roommates

I also found the people in this country to be extremely generous , confident and social . . Nonetheless , I was feeling a bit homesick and decided to return home

My Experience in Las Vegas

After a short time , I went to Las Vegas , Nevada since it has a high concentration of foreign immigrants who mostly work in the casinos . I put an advertisement in a newspaper offering to teach English as a foreign language . Fortunately , I got a few students quickly . I taught them in my kitchen with the use of a small blackboard placed on the wall . At that time I

realized that Las Vegas didn�t have an English language institute , so my colleague and I established one in the heart of the city . The business of the institute flourished . However in my free time , I took part in some of the sinful activities of Las Vegas . This kind of lifestyle made me sick of myself . I soon got tired of these social evils in the society . Life appeared meaningless and confused . I wanted to have a change again so I faxed my resume to Abu Hussein for him to help me find work in Saudi Arabia . To my surprise , I was offered a job to teach English to employees of a petrochemical . company in Jubail

. Within one month I was there

Repentance

I took many books to Jubail on various topics . One day I was reading a book on philosophy . The book suggested the need for making sincere repentance to God . I had never made repentance in my life . I started recalling all people I had wronged

and the wrong I did to myself in that process . Then , I repented hoping for the best . After a short time , I thought that perhaps God had accepted my repentance . A clear indicator of this acceptance was that God put specific people in my life and allowed certain situations to occur that guided me to the right path . I would like to share some . of these circumstances with the reader

The Meaning of Freedom

I was with Abu Hussein . He also had a friend visiting him . I mentioned to them that I was used to having a lot more freedom in America than what was present in their country . The visitor said , �It depends on what you mean by freedom . In your part of the world , no matter how well parents teach morality to their children inside the home , as soon as they go outside , they generally encounter the society in contradiction to that morality . On the other hand , in most Muslim communities , the morals taught to the children at home are very similar to what they find away from � ? home . So who really has the freedom here

Like it or not , I was inclined to agree with his interpretation of freedom in which immorality tends to be prevalent in societies that are overly liberal . In this case , too much freedom often becomes a negative aspect of society , not a positive one . From his

analogy , I also understood that the Islamic guidelines and restrictions sanctioning human behavior in Muslim societies are not meant to curtail human freedom; rather , . they serve to define and dignify human freedom

The Game of Roulette

A further opportunity to learn about Islam arose when I was invited to sit with a group of Muslims over dinner . After mentioning to the group that I had been living in Las Vegas , Nevada before coming to the Middle East , a Muslim from America said , �You must make sure you die as a good Muslim . � I immediately asked him to explain what he meant . He said , �If you die as a non-Muslim , it is like playing the game of roulette in which you put all of your chips (all of your life , including your deeds and your particular belief in God) on only one number , just hoping that perhaps by the Mercy of God , you will enter Paradise on Judgement Day . In contrast , if you die as a good Muslim , it is like spreading your chips all over the roulette board , so that every number is covered . In this way , no matter what number the ball falls on , you�re safe . In other words , living and dying as a good Muslim is the best insurance you will not go to Hell , and at the same time , it is the best investment that you�ll go . to Paradise

As a former resident of Las Vegas , I could directly relate to this example with the � . game of roulette

At this point , I recognized that it is the duty of all human beings to seek the truth to this life and not just blindly accept the religion that their society or parents follow . I also determined that I would not find the truth until I established a relationship with God . That being the case , I decided to concentrate on those religions emanating from Divine revelations linked with specific prophets and messengers . Hence , I . chose to continue my search for the truth within Judeo-Christianity and Islam

Even though I grew up as a Christian , I had been bewildered about Christianity . I felt like I inherited a mysterious religion beyond understanding . I believe it was for this reason that I was a Christian by name but not in practice . What�s more , I realized my confusion about Christian beliefs caused me to be in a state of non-religiousness . Nevertheless , while I was searching for the truth , I had a chance to sincerely re- . examine those beliefs I inherited from my parents , yet never bothered to scrutinize

Not an Ordinary Picnic

Some Muslims in Jubail arranged a special picnic for non-Muslims . After playing some games , we ate a delicious dinner . Finally , we heard a short lecture about Islam . I was shocked to learn that the Muslims believe in all the prophets

and also in all the revelations of God in their original form . Moreover , I learned the Qur�an was the last revelation sent for

the sake of all mankind , and Mohammad(pbuh) was the last Prophet and Messenger who received this revelation . As the Seal of Prophets , he has served as the best example for all to follow .

Upon leaving the picnic , they gave us a few booklets on comparative religion . One of them contained a dialogue between a Muslim and a Christian . The following conclusions were evident from the study of this booklet .

a) The real competition in this life is racing with one another to do good deeds to please the Creator , not the competition of pursuing more and more wealth or fame .

b) Hell is surrounded by lustful desires . These desires lead you to nothing else except to the roaring flames of Hellfire . On the other hand , Paradise is surrounded by challenges and if you look beyond them , you will find Paradise .

c) I found out that the Bible warns against adding or removing information from its teachings , which is evidently what happened . (See Jeremiah ٨ : ٨-٩; Revelations ٢٢ : ١٨-١٩) . God addresses this point in the Qur�an as well , �So woe to those who write the �scripture� with their own hands , then say , �This is from God , � in order to exchange it for a small price . Woe to them for what

their hands have written and woe to them for what they earn . � (٢ : ٧٩) Consequently , I was surprised to find out about hundreds of verses in the Bible which reveal a lack of harmony in Christian beliefs . According to these materials , God was One prior to Jesus (pbuh) . Likewise , Jesus (pbuh) propagated the belief in One God . However , after Jesus (pbuh) , Christianity emphasized the Trinity instead of the Oneness of God . Also , before Jesus (pbuh) , God was without sons and equals . Similarly , Jesus (pbuh) said he was God�s messenger , whereas after his time , Christianity stressed that he is God�s son or God Himself .

After reading these booklets , I finally determined that the Christian perception of God is very illogical indeed : God becomes man , which He created , and then allows himself to suffer and die as a sacrifice at the hands of His very own creation to cleanse mankind of sin inherited from Adam(pbuh) and his descendants . Belief in this concept became the source of salvation according to the Church .

Visiting a Mosque as a non–Muslim

I happened to be shopping with Abu Hussein and another friend when it was the time for prayer . We went to a mosque where they advised me to wash up in a certain way and then follow them in the rituals of the prayer . I did this by looking out of the corner of my eye . I sat still

after this peaceful experience and was somewhat nervous since I did not know what else to do . I , however , realized that non-Muslims are allowed to enter mosques under certain conditions . My friends asked me to wait outside the mosque during the congregational prayer to avoid any misunderstandings with the Muslims .

Correspondingly , I was with my Saudi friends on another occasion when it was again prayer time . They said , �Why don�t you pray with us ? Ask God for forgiveness , guidance to the truth and express gratitude to Him . � At the end of the prayer I felt relief and contentment , which I had never felt before . From that point , I was always looking forward to praying with them , even though I was not a Muslim and I was not praying correctly .

Overcoming Obstacles

There were several obstacles preventing me from converting to Islam . The fear of losing life-long friends and family members was predominantly on my mind . Furthermore , leaving certain vices in one go was not easy since conversion demanded a total change in lifestyle . I was mentally not yet ready to overcome these hurdles , even though Islamic practices were very soothing to me both mentally and spiritually . I admitted to an American Muslim friend in Jubail that I was very close to embracing Islam , but I needed a push forward . Consequently , he gave me an Islamic video to watch .

An Inspiring Video

Once again I was invited to a gathering at Abu Hussein�s residence . There were many young Saudi men in this group . After dinner they engaged in conversation , but I wasn�t able to speak Arabic . I noticed that there was a TV and VCR in this room . I remembered I had that video from my American Muslim friend in the car . Shortly thereafter , I started watching this video which posed a very important question : What is the purpose of life ? I was uncertain just as many other people in the world are unsure about the answer to this question . Needless to say , I learned a few important points from this video .

The lecturer in the video commented very precisely on what the purpose of life is . He said that the purpose of life is Islam or total

peaceful submission to the Will of Allah(God) . I was surprised to hear such a short . answer to what I thought was such a complex question

An additional point was that , unlike other religions or beliefs , the term �Islam� is not associated with any particular person or place . God has named the religion in the following Qur�anic verse : �Indeed , the Religion in the sight of God is Islam�� (٣ : ١٩) Anyone who embraces Islam is called a Muslim regardless of that person�s race , . sex or nationality . This is one of the reasons why Islam is a universal religion

Prior to my search for the truth , I had never seriously considered Islam as an option because of the constant negative portrayal of Muslims in the media . Similarly , it was disclosed in this video , that although Islam is characterized by high moral standards , not all Muslims uphold these standards . I learned the same can be said about adherents of other religions . I finally understood that we should not judge a religion by the actions of its followers alone

because all humans are sinful . On that account , we should not judge Islam by the actions of its proponents , but by its revelation (the Qur�an) and by the sayings and . (actions of Prophet Mohammad(pbuh

Lastly , the lecturer guided the viewer in decision making by presenting simple examples , as in the following : �If you are a Christian and want to

become a Muslim , it is like having an expensive suit that is a bit too large . Instead of throwing it away , you just make certain alterations so it fits you better . In other words , you do not cast away all your previous

beliefs and practices that you�ve had since your childhood . You rather take them with you to Islam and incorporate them into your life as a Muslim , with modifications � . and due refinements

The Aftermath

After viewing the video my heart and mind were absolutely convinced that Islam is the truth . I experienced the weight of disbelief and sins flying off my body . I felt so light as if I were rising above the earth . This experience , coupled with the long process of reasoning , solved the �purpose of life puzzle� . It revealed Islam as the truth , thereby replenishing my �spiritual landscape� with belief , purpose , direction , and action . From this experience

I deduced that man might neglect the guidance of God and establish his own standards of living . Ultimately , however , he will discover it was only a mirage that . eluded him

My Insistence on Accepting Islam

I called Abu Hussein and walked with him to the passage leading to another room in order to get away from the gathering . I told him that I wanted to accept Islam right now . He advised me to study more about Islam before embracing it . I insisted that I wanted to accept it now and then without any delay . On my insistence he led me in saying the shahada or

the formal testimony of faith to become a Muslim . Abu Hussein then announced my conversion to the group . They were surprised and overjoyed . Everybody hugged me one by one . They advised me to take a bath for purification purposes and start offering prayer as best as I can . I started praying regularly in the mosque the next day

.

I was subsequently reminded that this formal testimony to become a Muslim confirms one�s belief in all the prophets of God , along with all of His Divine revelations in their original forms , thereby updating and completing one�s religion to the last of the prophets Muhammad(pbuh) and to the final revelation of God[the Qur�an] . The following point became overwhelmingly clear to me : Had Jesus(pbuh) been the last prophet of God and had the Gospel been the final book of revelation , I would have just followed that creed . As a result , I have naturally chosen to follow Islam , which represents the final revelation from the Creator with Prophet Mohammad (pbuh) as . the seal of the prophets , who is the best example for mankind to follow

Muslim Name

After two days I went to the mosque to participate in the Friday congregational prayer . Abu Hussein suggested that I repeat the shahada again in front of the congregation to have more of an impact . I agreed . We were both sitting in the mosque waiting for the sermon . Abu Hussein asked me , �What Muslim name you would like to have so that the Imam(prayer leader) can introduce you with your Muslim name ? � I told him , �I am not sure . He should introduce me with my American name . � Abu Hussein kept reciting the Quran sitting by my side . Then he came across the word �Yahya� . He touched me with his

elbow and said quietly to me , �How does Yahya sound to you as your name ? � I asked , �What does it mean ? � He said , �John the Baptist . Its other meaning is to live . � I said , �That will do

since I know of John the Baptist from the Bible . Furthermore , this name signifies a new life for me in Islam . It is , indeed , an appropriate Muslim name for me . � After the prayer , the Imam invited me to repeat the shahada in front of the very large congregation . About three hundred people congratulated me and hugged me . individually waiting anxiously for their turns

Many people said , �Accepting Islam is the best decision you have ever made in your life . � I was surprised that all the people cared to personally congratulate me . It . raised my morale and spirits very high

When I look back on this experience of becoming a Muslim , I believe it happened because it was the Will of Allah that I had an intense curiosity to learn about other cultures , followed by a sincere desire to find the truth of this life . Allah knows best !!! and all Praise is due to Him

Goal of Life

I was told to learn more about Islam every day and try to put it into practice . I was also told that I was not responsible for what I didn�t know about in Islam

initially . I appreciated this flexibility in Islam . After a short time , I understood that Islam is in direct contrast to the western focus on the self . Islam tells us to look beyond ourselves and our vain desires . Islam guides and motivates us to focus on Allah . By doing so , we begin to fulfil the purpose of our life , which is to believe in and worship Almighty God and thus attain peace with our Creator and ourselves . Hence , . Islam serves as the goal and the purpose of life

Islamic Education and Growth

I was fortunate to be in an Islamic country when I accepted Islam because of the presence of many knowledgeable Muslims along with an abundance of Islamic materials . I could readily understand and appreciate what I was learning because Islamic teachings were being put into practice in the society . I attended a weekly Islamic meeting with individuals from many lands . We met once a week for four years . We studied Qur�anic reading and interpretation , along with some memorization of the Qur�an . We also received extensive education in various aspects of Islam at a basic level . This Islamic education provided me with a good foundation upon which to . further purify myself

Islamic Marriage

Marriage is highly recommended in Islam . I realized that by marrying an Arabic-speaking Muslim , I would be giving my children one of the best possible gifts , which is the Arabic language . Hence , I married a Syrian lady , and with the Mercy of Allah , our children are doing well in Arabic and are learning the Quran . When I visited America , my family inquired about marriage in Islam . I explained to them that the obligations of spouses are assigned by the Creator and are not man-made rules . For that reason , these guidelines are perfect and there is no fear of any foul play if we adhere to . them sincerely

Reaction of the Family

My acceptance of Islam stunned my family initially . Finally they said , �If Islam makes you happy , we are happy for you . � Thus , we mutually respected each other

.

The Shahada of My Mother

My sister called me from America and said that our mother was extremely ill . My wife and I rushed from Saudi Arabia to America . During our stay there , I asked my mother , � Do you believe in one God ? � She said , � Yes . � I said to her say , �La ilaha illa Allah . � She repeated this in Arabic . She also repeated the translation of this sentence in English , �There is no deity but Allah� . After a few days I asked her , �Do you believe in all the Prophets like Adam , Noah , Abraham , Moses , Jesus , and Mohammad ? � She said , �Yes . � I said , �Then repeat after me , �La ilaha illa Allah Mohammadan Rasoolu llah . � She also said it in English , i . e . , �There is no deity but Allah and Mohammad is His Messenger . � She left us about five days after her acceptance of Islam . I thank Allah for guiding my mother to the right path during her last few days in this world . When I reflect upon it , I recall that she usually cared for others� needs more than her own . Evidently , Allah

!!! has been very merciful to her . Allah knows best

Her Extraordinary Observation

It was amazing what my mother said to me during her last days in this world . She said , �There is a golden light coming out of your forehead . � I told her that it is there because we believe in and pray to Allah . Her observation is described in the Holy Qur�an : �the Day that Allah will not disgrace the Prophet[(Mohammad(pbuh) and those who believe with him . Their light will run forward before them� They will say : �Our Lord ! Keep perfect our light for us [and do not put it off till we cross over the �(Sirat(a slippery bridge over the Hell) safely] and grant us forgiveness� (۶۶ : ۸

Holy Quran ۲۲ : ۸

And among men there is he who disputes about Allah without knowledge and without . guidance and without an illuminating book

BROTHER MUBARAK

I am from a good and loving family , and we were raised believing in Christian principles . From the time I was in my early twenties , I have always had trouble understanding one very important teaching of christianity . Why do I need a �saviour� ? Why isn�t God powerful enough to forgive me by himself without the sacrifice of another (Jesus) ? No one ever gave me a very good answer , but I still . believed and practiced my faith

Until recently , I was an over-the-road truck driver . I was in a truckstop in Iowa eating , and a driver sat down next to me and got �very

creative� ordering off of the menu , avoiding eating meat . I asked him if he was a vegetarian and he said no , he was a Muslim , and he only ate meat when it had been properly and humanely slaughtered . We talked for a while , and he

brought up my �age old question� about God having the power to forgive �all by himself , without any help� ! He gave me an english translation of the Holy Qur�an . and told me to read it , and my questions would be answered

When I started reading al-Fatihah I thought about what a beautiful prayer it was , and so I started praying it a few times every day . It became my favourite �Psalm� . It seemed to so fully and completely address my inner desire to praise God . And the rest of the Holy Qur�an ! I felt as though every �hidden question� about life I had ever had was being answered one after another . About six to eight weeks passed . And finally , one Friday , I parked my ١٨ wheeler , and hunted down a mosque . I was in the Twin Cities , and it wasn�t easy ! I found the Islamic Community Center , but it was closed for Friday . I looked through the window and saw a poster on the wall about an Eid bake sale at the Masjid . I wrote down the address and drove there . I found the mosque

and attended the Friday Prayers . The sermon was very topical to things I wondered , about . I felt as though the Imam knew I was coming , and had prepared a sermon just for me . Of course , now I know . . . Allah knew I was coming , and had a sermon prepared just for me ! And then the prayer . . . I was never so moved in my entire life ! There are no words that I know of in the English language to describe the wholeness that washed over me . Here I was , with all these men , different colors , different nationalities , rich and poor , all lining up shoulder-to-shoulder to pray together as brothers . I lined up with them . I didn�t know what I was doing , I didn�t know what was being said (I didn�t know they were beginning with my beloved al-Fatihah !) but I knew this was true worship . I knew I had come home . At the conclusion of the prayers , I asked one of the leaders , Brother Hamdi , �How do I join ? � He talked with me for several minutes , asked about my �journey� to that point . He asked what I knew , and what I believed . He asked what was my desire . He told me what God�s desire was . I said �This makes so much sense� . Then Bro . Hamdi said

Let�s do it ! � . So he had the brothers sit back down , and led me through my� shahada . When I was finished , all the brothers shouted �Allahu Akbar ! � (�God is the Greatest ! �) three times . They all embraced me and said �Welcome Home !Brother� . Welcome home indeed

That night , as I was driving my truck across the clear , cold Minnisota night , I looked out my window and saw that the moon was a crescent moon . Welcome home indeed !

As I became acclimatized to my new life , learning the basic �halals and harams� of eating , dressing , behavior--I was a little overwhelmed at first . Every Friday would find me in a different city in a different Mosque . They were always my Brothers , and it was really terrific to see that �nothing important� changed whether I was in a mosque that had been built as a mosque and had hundreds of members , or if it was an old church building converted into a mosque , or a house with only a handful of Brothers . It was always the same . But I did lack continuity in my spiritual life . I bet I was really a sight pulling my big truck into rest areas on the Interstate , and hopping out to perform Salat ! I prayed that I would get the continuity I needed to be more !integrated into Islam . And , AlHamdulillah

My prayers were answered ! I suffered a detached retina and am now unable to drive a truck . I am back in college studying to be a school teacher . And I am the member of al-Rasool Islamic Center in Salt Lake City . The Brothers have taken me under their wings and are providing me with the continuity (and sense of community that is central to Islam) that I needed . I help out with the Eid Committee(my speciality is clean-up !) and the Muharrem preparations . We are a small , but very active shia community here . I am so blessed . It is all such a blessing ! And that is how I got my name; Mubarak (which means blessed/blessing) because I feel so blessed to have Islam in my life . It is such a blessing to say : �I am a Muslim� ! My hope and prayer ! is that others may come this great gift from God . The gift of Islam

Holy Quran ٢٧ : ٧٧

. And most surely it is a guidance and a mercy for the believers

ISLAM AND ME

My name is Lyndsey-Yazmeen Koenig; I am ١٧ years old and I live in Maine in the northeastern United States of America . I have been a Muslim since September ١٨th , . ٢٠٠١ . This is my story of Islam and me

Jewish people celebrate Hanukah and are a different religion than us � different� from Christianity . Judaism and Christianity are the two main religions we

should focus on�� As a teacher of mine from ninth grade reported to me I knew nothing of Islam . Nine years in Public School and didn�t hear one word about Islam . . To be honest with you up until ٩\١١ I have never seen a hijaabed woman

It seems as though this was a terror attack aimed at the U . S . A . by someone or� something that hated us simply hated us . � It was the day after ٩\١١ and I was watching the news , as I have done nonstop since then , and I heard about �Islam� and �Muslims . � I sat there wondering what they were . Right then I felt a string being pulled inside my brain sending a wave to my fingers telling me , �research , research , and research ! � This happens to me a lot , I owe much of my knowledge to this reflex , which I adore so much . So the string was pulled letting the dam of . knowledge came rushing towards me

I run to the bathroom , bedroom find the comfiest pair of clothes I have preparing myself for a long day of reading and research . Grab a cup of coffee and put my long hair in it�s famous �rats nest� on the top of my head . Turn the computer on and get comfy in the leather chair . Cold to the touch , but comforting like my pilot�s chair on my way

to wisdom . I proceed to the search engine Dad has raved about; I type in �Muslim� and press the magic �go� key ! My eyes fill with colors of red , white , blue � letters of �m� , �i� � Links ! Links ! Links ! Which to chose , they�re all so beautiful ! ? There are the regular sites�then there are the exceptional sites ! The first one I ventured into was www . islamonline . net taught me the basics but I still yearned for more . I continued to visit numerous websites but I still couldn�t find exactly what I was looking for . I wanted to talk to a young Muslim girl my age . It took me about a week of serious searching and scaling almost all of the internet (probably , LoL) to find . an e-mail pen pal site . Now the real story begins

I filed my pen-pal form on the site writing , �Non-Muslim seeking to speak with Muslim young woman to find out more about Islam� and hoped for the best . Within three days I received an e-mail from a young woman named Maryam who is a born Muslim , but her mom is a revert . Maryam and I began talking just about school , family , friends , and our problems . We became very close friends , almost sisters . As I was continuing to watch the American Media , which I would later find out is very bias

and usually sides with the Jewish people , I had more and more questions on Islam . , Except this time I actually had someone to ask the specific questions to . The first question I asked was �Do u think UBL did this ? � and she kind of avoided my question (which I later found out why and will explain) so I went on . The next question was about the scarf (hijaab); she answered me with unwavering attention and precision . The hijaab was the hardest thing to put into action for me (I will explain later) . But Maryam (bless her soul) did her best and told me everything she could � and what she couldn�t she gave me URL�s which I could read more information if I wanted . Then there were the rules about boyfriends , pork , and more . The rules weren�t the things that caught my attention , it was the benefits , love , structure , . discipline , and most of all spirituality

I was never religious before Islam . I went to church maybe a total of five times in my life . My mother grew up in a strict Roman Catholic family in New Hampshire with ۶ children . My father grew up in a Protestant\Atheist household � really not practicing ever once . So our religious life in the Koenig family was not very strong . I can remember going to church as a child and hating it . The other times

I can only remember are funerals and weddings . I just remember listening to the Priests babble on and on never made sense to me . Once in a great while when I was feeling low I would read some of the Bible but always felt like it was a boggled mess that was so difficult to understand and comprehend . Not just that but it didn�t make sense to me at all . Before Islam I always felt like there was a big chunk of my heart . missing yet I didn�t know what it was

So , how do I convert ? � I asked Maryam on an early fall day . �Take the shaada . � � I took the shaada . Now I am a Muslim . The date is September ١٨th , ٢٠٠١ . My heart . felt full , I felt I have a purpose , life inside me to live

I went to good ol� Wal-Mart and bought some plain handkerchiefs � blue , red , green , and pink . I decided to wear these as my souped up version of makeshift hijaab . I have worn handkerchiefs over my hair before; it was not a big difference for me . Then came the days of wearing the handkerchiefs for ٢ weeks , maybe three and going out one damp cold morning without it . It was almost as though I couldn�t function . I realized it�s time to try the full hijaab . I met another sister , Umme

means Mom in Arabic , but she�s like a mom to me) , from Maryland via the) computer . Because I was looking for someone to send me some books , maybe some extra hijaabs . Bless Umme�s soul because I went to the mailbox one morning and got the beloved yellow slip saying �you have a box� so I went literally POSTAL (no pun intended , yeah right) wondering if it was from Umme or my Aunt � my aunt always sends me tons and tons of hair products which I can�t get enough of . �Here it is�someone sent you a lot of stuff , � said the Postal Worker and I look up and to my amazement there�s a box as two times wider then me (and trust me , that�s wide) and half my height ! ! ! My eyes open with wonder and shear excitement ! I lug the box out to the car and squeeze it into my mom�s Nissan Altima , which thank goodness is a large car , if I would have had my Saab I would have had to tie it to the roof , and flew home as fast as I could . �It�s a box of treasures ! ! ! Ma� come look ! ! I can�t believe this ! ! � I said to my mother , screaming with excitement almost tearing up because I couldn�t believe a person could ever be this generous . This was my second encounter of the love

. (and sincerity of Islam (of course Maryam

The box contained treasures . Dresses , Hijaabs , Books , Pamplets , Qur�an , Pocket sized Qur�an , tapes , and the most beloved and used present of all �The Beginner�s Guide to Prayer� . I still have this pamphlet now and it�s falling apart � I still have to use it on the last part of my prayer (where you�re sitting) because I . don�t know all of it yet . I have never used a book so much in my life

. I took out the hijaabs and the dresses and I wore my favorite outfit of all

Now comes the story of hijaab; the best benefit Allah has given to us women . To start the story off correctly I should explain how my mother reacted to me being a Muslim . She at first didn�t understand what exactly it was . Luckily I had Maryam to help me out on this one as well . Her mother , is a revert and she had to go through the same thing I was going through (telling her family) and she was nice enough to send my mother an e-mail explaining and trying to help . She helped a lot; mom was a bit more relaxed . It took about a week for her to warm up to Islam; to this day she still asks . questions and I couldn�t be more happy to answer them

Onto hijaab story ! The first day I went out in hijaab

was in my new drabs (above) and could not feel more proud . There are not enough words in the English , French , and German dictionaries to explain the way I felt . Since this was about almost ٢ months after ٩\١١ everyone was still on shaky ground about Muslims . I thought , living in the sticks of Maine , that everyone would be so mean to me because a lot of people here ٩٩ . ٩٩٪ of them are Christian and about ٥٠٪ are racist . I was wrong; I totally underestimated my own people . People were looking at me (of course) but not in a negative way . I thought the hijaab was going to be a total mess (the first time I heard of it) but today it is the best blessing Allah has given to us . The benefits [to list] would take me years , if not centuries . The most important of all is the modesty in front of men . I always , since I began to become a woman , have felt like a sirloin steak being picked over by men every day ! The only time when I feel safe and secure is in my Islamic Dress�that consists of hijaab (covering hair , neck and ears) and loose fitting clothes . Until this day , anytime which I go out without hijaab (which , alhumdulilah has been few) I feel like I am completely naked ! The hijaab , for women , is

the best thing possible . I would also like to point out [to the non-Muslims] this important fact ! In the �Muslim� countries (Iran , Pakistan , Afghanistan , etc .) where ٩٩ . ٩٩٪ of the women cover , the rate of rape and sexual assault are so low they barely exist . This is a fact � (NOTE : Get the statistics from the sisters !)- Not just a .rumor

The rest of my story is incredibly amazing . I have been living the Muslim life , alhumdulilah , and I have been trying to do my best . I have since stopped a lot of haraam (sinful) actions and continue to work on getting rid of the rest . The last part of my story is the most amazing part . I would never guess this would ever happen . My father , who I said earlier has no religion , started to see the change Islam had on my life (for the positive) and he took note of this . I was on the telephone with him one night and he asked me to send him some information on what Islam consists of . When I heard this I said to myself , �This is the pure actions of Allah; no one , or thing , could have possibly done such an act of pure grace . � This is Islam in brief , and this . is Islam and me

, (Thank you (Salaams

Author�s note : I would like

. to dedicate This to Maryam Ezzedine , Umme Zahid , And Allah

Holy Quran ۲۸ : ۸۵

Most surely He Who has made the Quran binding on you will bring you back to the destination . Say : My Lord knows best him who has brought the guidance and him . who is in manifest error

IT FILLED ME WITH PEACE AND HAPPINESS

My folks believed in God , but did not �practice� their �faith� . I was raised as a devote Christian with my Grandparents being heavily involved with Church activities and members of the board . As I grew up I was extremely well versed in all the song . (hymns and scriptures (as well as I went to a private school for elementary

When I went to college I went to a Christian University . It was there that I was first exposed to Islam . We were required to learn of other faiths; I believe this was to strengthen our faith . This exposure did not strengthen my faith , but rather created . doubts and questions

The odd thing is that while studying a little bit of Islam I met a Muslim man that I befriended who introduced me to their community of friends where I met a man that is now my husband . When married I still had not converted nor interested in conversion . I knew that there was only one faith and it was the path of Christianity . I had no intentions of converting my husband and he had no intentions of converting . me

After about two years of marriage we decided to have baby and that�s when . everything started to change for me

My husband had been diagnosed with Kidney failure and I was two months pregnant . Times were difficult needless to say . I found myself angry and praying to God . I found little comfort in turning to God . At some point I think I just disconnected from God and my faith . When my daughter was about ٢ � I started to think about her future and her up bringing . I knew there was a God , but had lost my relationship and could not raise a child into that type of world . I begin to look into Islam , as I knew my husband would not allow me to raise her in my faith . I did not share this with him because I did not want to be pushed into something I knew only a little bit about . I began going to the mosque and meeting with the Imam as I knew he was an educated man in Islam who could answer my questions in great detail . I struggled with the thought of conversion , as it was so ingrained in my head that �Christianity� was the only correct faith . I started to analyze my previous beliefs with what I was now learning and realized that I had some decisions to make and had to be honest with myself and reasons for even considering a new

faith . When I stepped outside of the box it became apparent to me that I was following �Christianity� because that was what I knew and the only faith I really ever learned about . I realized that there were so many missing pieces to the puzzle in my faith and lack of understanding why certain routines and actions were being taken . within the faith

At first I thought , �Oh you are just doing this because you want your daughter to believe in �something� . It may be that which started the search , but it is not what ultimately made me decide to convert . After grilling a ton of people and reading a ton of books , I realized that Islam was a way of life that provided guidelines and with understanding . The day that I took Shahadah it filled me with peace and happiness . The idea of conversion also meant sharing the information with my family so that they would understand a few changes in my life . Change is always a struggle , but with our . personal Jihad we grow and learn and this makes us stronger Muslims

Holy Quran ٣١ : ٥

. These are on a guidance from their Lord , and these are they who are successful

(J . SCOTT LYNCH (SAEED MUHAMMAD

explaination

I converted to Islam about ٢١ months ago . My journey to Islam was a long one that . spanned over more than ٢ decades

All–American Boy

Allah is a permanent reality that works in the lives of those who hear His message . Not having a personal relationship with my Creator tugged at my heart and mind for nearly two decades . Then , I discovered Islam . I would not be considered in the West as a stereotypical Muslim . I believe the popular Western stereotype of a Muslim male is something like the following : dark skin , dark hair , bearded , Middle-Eastern or Asian descent , dressed in modest clothing and possibly a head covering . No , I�m the complete opposite of this . I am in many ways the epitome of the �all-American

boy� : blond-hair , blue-eyed , corn-fed Protestant/Christian background . However , Islam and Muslims take on many faces , many backgrounds , many cultures , many nationalities and many tongues . Our family moved a few times in my youth , but my world was limited to the heart of the �Bible-belt� in Augusta , GA , and Spartanburg and Greenville , SC , all fairly large communities , but all offered little in religious diversity . I had normal , loving , God-fearing parents�they are still happily married today after more than ٣٠ years , and one younger brother . I grew up as a �PK� (for , those of you outside of Protestant Christianity

I was a �preacher�s kid�) . My father was a Southern Baptist minister for more than ٢٥ years . As you can imagine , for the first ١٨ years of my life , I attended church every Sunday morning , Sunday night , Wednesday night and any number of other nights that the church lights were on . I grew up believing in God and Jesus , or , should I say , fearing God and Jesus . Like most adolescents , I was afraid not to believe in the religion of my parents . However , something was wrong . I can recall thinking , even at age ١٠ , �this Jesus� story just doesn�t make sense to me . � Even at this young age , I didn�t accept the divinity of Jesus and the notion of Christian salvation (i . e . , Jesus dying for my sins) . As all my church friends were getting saved , baptized and confirmed during their pre-teen and teenage years (this all seemed like more of a rite of passage than a sincere decision for most , or just the popular thing to do) , I quietly sat in the church pews questioning the fundamentals of Christian theology . My parents , my church-friends and the various churches my father pastored throughout my childhood all prayed for my salvation.

Then , one Sunday night , I succumbed to the pressure . I was ١٢ years old and my family was at the First Baptist Church

of North Spartanburg (in Spartanburg , South Carolina) . After a fiery sermon , which obviously moved a lot of people , my father came to me and said , �Son , do you want to ask Jesus into your heart ? It�s about time you do so . � Tired of all the solicitations , tired of all the �Scott , we�re praying for you , � tired of always feeling like the one who didn�t belong , I lied to my father and said , �Yes POPS . � That night , I repeated after my father and supposedly accepted Jesus into my heart . I was presented to the church as a new Christian , baptized and immediately became part of the Christian community; although , I was very empty inside . For the next ٥ years , I put on the charade of a good preacher�s kid . I attended Bible studies , went on summer mission trips and even had a couple �saves� (individuals becoming Christian) contributed to me . This was all under the veil of a big lie , that night when I was ١٢ years old , the night that I supposedly became a Christian myself , I never asked Jesus in my heart . True , I went through the motions , but it meant nothing to .me

When I graduated high school and it was time to go off to college , I only thought of one thing : religious freedom . I viewed the

opportunity as the chance to move away from my parents and explore the religions of the world . I moved about ٧٠ miles away from my parents to Rock Hill , SC , enrolled in Winthrop College and majored in religion . However , moving from one part of the �Bible-belt� to another part of the �Bible-belt� didn�t help my search . Rock Hill was a smaller town than I grew up in and there were even more churches per capita . Once again , the only religious diversity was in the form of what favor of Christianity you wanted for the week . I did manage to run across a couple freethinking religion professors that mentored me in exploring religion . If anything , they pointed me to many different sources to satisfy my quest . I rarely pushed the envelope of my comfort level and only ended up exploring different forms of Christianity . During the two years I spent in little Rock Hill , SC , I attended Roman Catholic , Greek Orthodox , Pentecostal and many non-affiliated/community churches . It would not be until . another couple years before I would experience non-Christian religious expression

Beyond the �Chosen People� Vision

Unsatisfied with the lack of religious diversity , I left Rock Hill , SC for the University of South Carolina in the state�s capital of Columbia (metro population : half-million) . I thought , �Surely I can find other religions in a city this size . � Once again , I majored in religion . While

in Columbia for the remainder of my undergraduate degree , I became extremely interested in Judaism , but not on a spiritual level , but rather , on an academic level . I was attracted to the Hebrew language . I took more than ۴ years of a combined Bible and Modern Hebrew course and excelled at reading the original scriptures and reading Jewish prayers . In fact , because one of my professors was a local rabbi , I even taught ۶-grade Hebrew school for a term (to this day , a decade later , I can still read the Hebrew texts) . I was very involved with Judaism in Columbia , SC , but much like Christianity , it�s fundamental beliefs seemed empty to me . Inside , I asked questions like , �If the Jews are considered God�s �chosen people� where does that leave me ? � While at the University of South Carolina , I was exposed to a glimpse of Islam . I took a class entitled �Islamic Institutions and Traditions . � It was taught by a non-Muslim who had taught university in Egypt , so he seemed to be an authority on Islam but the class did little for me other than provide a good textbook background for me . Half the class consisted of Muslims , so I think the class� integrity was kept in check . Half way through the class , I did visit the local mosque and witnessed salah (prayer) for the first time

Although I didn�t understand what seemed like an impersonal approach to prayer . and worship I was impressed by Islam�s simplicity and humbleness (e . g . prostrating before almighty Allah) in prayer and worship . My brief encounter with Islam , both in a college class and my visit to a mosque , planted a seed that would grow for the next ten years . After my undergraduate studies , I went out into the workforce . For the next ٥ years , I withdrew from religion and became what I considered to be agnostic . I knew there was one God , however , I didn�t know a lot about Him . For me , Christianity and Judaism did not address the issue of the proper worship of one God . My professional positions took me all across the United States where I finally settled in Fort Collins , Colorado . After waking up day after day to the beautiful mountains , prairies and expanses of Colorado , I began to question the concept of �God� again . How could there be so much beauty and order in the world and God not intimately reveal Himself to mankind ? I began to recall the religious experience I�d had over the past ١٠-١٥ years . I looked at Christianity and said �No . � I still couldn�t accept the Jesus theology . I looked at Judaism . Again , �No . � I couldn�t live with the Jewish customs and belief in a �chosen

people . � Finally , I began to look at Islam . My impression of Islam was a combination of several things . It consisted of the one class I took in university , my one visit to the mosque in Columbia , SC , and then the media (I�ve now discovered that the U . S . media does not accurately display Islam) . I began researching the fundamental beliefs of Islam . I decided to strip away the stereotypes and examine :exactly what Islam is all about . After some study , I found the following

Islam has the strongest declaration of monotheistic faith of any religion (I said to-١ ,(�myself , �check , I agree

,(�the belief that God has no partners (again , �big check-٢

the belief that God has revealed Himself many times through prophets and-٣ messengers and His message has been confused and distorted by man (I always had ,(�a hard time believing parts of the Bible and its interpretation , so �check for now

(�that Islam is not just a religion , but an entire way of life (very appealing , �check-٤
.

Reading the Qur�an

After reading about Islam , I set out to inquire a little deeper . I set out to find a Muslim . At the time of my inquiry into Islam , I was working in a very large company with more than ١٠٠٠ employees . I thought , �Surely there�s a Muslim or two that would � . be willing to answer my questions

My search

did not take long . I met a kind , quiet Muslim man named �Hani . � I approached the man and told him that I wanted to learn more about his religion . The first thing Hani recommended was reading the Qur�an , the revelation of Allah to His Prophet Muhammad . Hani even gave me a Qur�an (In fact , the small Arabic-English Qur�an that Brother Hani gave me is still one of my prized possessions .) Hani inscribed in it the following words that continue to touch my heart : �May Allah guide us to the right path . � I began reading the Qur�an and to my surprise , it made sense to me . Coming from a Christian background with a good understanding of Jewish history/theology , the Qur�an connected all the dots for me . It confirmed so many doubts I had about Judaism and Christianity , and provided the roadmap that I was looking for . After reading only part of the Qur�an , I said to myself , �I believe in this . I should be a Muslim . � But what would my family say ? What would my friends say ? What would my co-workers think ? So , for months , I kept my feelings quiet and continued to study Islam silently . I began to read more books , subscribed to Muslim email lists , purchased Islamic videos and even began memorizing the prayers . Out of all the aspects of Islam

that I observed , the prayer impacted me the most . Like the worshipers I saw in the videos , I too wanted to bow down and prostrate myself before my Holy Creator . Finally , after more than eight months of inquiry with my friend Hani , he must have .sensed I was ready to take the next step

In early January ٢٠٠١ , he invited me to the Islamic Center of Fort Collins (Colorado) . It is where more than ١٠٠٠ Muslims in Northern Colorado go to pray and worship . He invited me to the Fajr prayer (before sunrise) . At that time , it was around ٦ : ١٥ a . m . You can imagine what I was thinking : �God , you want me to get up before ٦ : ٠٠ on a cold Colorado winter morning and go worship you ? � I recall not sleeping too well the night before . I felt like I was being called to do something . I made it down to Islamic Center and met up with Hani . When I went in , I was instructed to take off my shoes in the vestibule . I walked through a large communal area and Hani showed me the area that Muslims perform wudu , the washing and purifying of one�s body before going before Allah . Hani and I then went into the prayer area . The prayer area was a large , simple , quiet room . There were many

books , mostly in Arabic , on several of the walls , and the room seemed to point in one direction (the direction to the Ka`bah in Makkah , or the first house of worship to Allah) . When we walked in , there were ٦-٧ Muslim men praying . For the second time , I saw again in-person what I had seen only in videos , worshipers bowing before their Creator , but with a new understanding after all the careful reading I did . It sent chills down my spine . I too wanted to worship as the men before me . The familiar call to prayer , the Adhan , was called and Hani asked me if I wanted to pray . I nervously said , �Yes ! � Hani said , �Just do as the rest of us do . � And for the first time , I prayed and worshiped Allah as He commands . I didn�t know all the words or their meanings , but it had a powerful impact . After the prayer , Hani asked me if I would like to become a Muslim . Again , I said , �Yes ! � I had already practiced and said the Shahadah dozens of times , and on that cold morning on January ٣ , ٢٠٠١ , at around ٦ : ٣٠ a . m . , I said it in front of those Muslim men . Al-Hamdulilah (Glory be to Allah) , I . became a Muslim

The

moment I said �La ilaha illaAllah Muhammad Rasooul Allah� (There is no god but Allah , Muhammad is the Prophet of Allah) in front of those men , I felt a huge burden lifted from my heart . I felt liberated from my search . For the first time in my life , I knew the Truth�the Truth of Allah . It�s now been over a year since I became a Muslim . Has it been easy ? Not always . Have I had struggles , setbacks and doubts ? Absolutely , I�m human . However , the past year has been the best of my life . Allah has blessed me beyond belief . I�ve had a peace about me that is indescribable . And although I can�t really describe how it feels , I know where it comes from�it comes minute-after-minute , hour-after-hour , day-after-day , trying my best to follow Allah�s true Deen (religion , way of life) . My peace is knowing that Allah has revealed the Truth to me . To my Muslims brothers and sisters and all non-Muslims , may Allah guide us all to the right path .

Holy Quran ٢ : ٢٣

And if you are in doubt as to that which We have revealed to Our servant , then produce a chapter like it and call on your witnesses besides Allah if you are truthful .

KHADIJAH JONES

From a very young age I have always believed in God . My mum used to send me and my elder sister

to places such as Kiro Club , there we would all play games and the team leaders would read stories from the bible and before we went home we would all pray in a . circle . This took place at the Primary School we went to St Mark�s C of E

Then to get me into the high school where my mother wanted me to go , St Peter�s , I had to go church every Sunday , so my mother has always encouraged me and my sister to go to religious events , but on the whole my family is not a practicing Christian family . Everyone in my family was christened , and all the weddings take place in . churches

I started having contact with my father when I was ١١ years old , as he thought that he was going to die in hospital and he wanted to see me and my sister before . But Alhamdulilah my dad survived , as he got better me and my sister stayed in touch with him and his family and this was when I got introduced to Islam . I used to go and see my father very often , he lived with my nan and cousin , and next door lived my Aunty , her husband and her son . Both my Aunty and my cousin had embraced Islam for different reasons . So as I used to go very often I saw how differently my Aunty and Cousin lived , they were

so dedicated to God it was unreal to me . I respected them in a big way , As I used to see them praying I started asking questions , like why ?

I didn�t really understand as at this point I had only just turned ١٢ years , so they explained Islam to me in a very easy way . I started going to Islamic circles with them , I went to conferences . After ١٠ long months of dedication to Islam I converted . I converted in my Aunty�s house with all the sisters there who had helped me , my Aunty made lots of food , I had to do my Ghusl (Bath) so I was pure and then I was sat down on a prayer mat and I read the Kalima three times . Everyone brought me presents and advice it was lovely .

As a treat my father paid for me and my aunty to go to Leicester for a four day Islamic event . It was the best four days of my life , I met so many new friends , everyone there was a Muslim , it was just like how an Islamic state would be . Everyone was treated the same , it was wonderful . My dad paid for that because he new how my mother and the rest of the family were treating me , so he lied to my mother and told her that I was going somewhere with my Aunty because he new that if

. my mum new the truth then she would not allow me to go

My sister and father were the only one�s who accepted me , my mum�s side of the family hated Islam , they said I could be a Muslim but not dress like one , so once I had put my views across to them that no matter what they said or did I would not compromise Islam for NOTHING ! They had to except it . They all thought it was a . phase I was going through as I was only ١٢ , I converted on the ٢٢ November ١٩٩٨

My father passed away in ١٩٩٩ , I was devastated as I had got so close to him through Islam , as I could talk to him about anything and I don�t have that kind of relationship with my mum , but as I studied death so many times I new that Allah would not give me something that I could not bare . After this my mum�s side of the family had learnt to accept it . Now ٥ years later everyone is fine , my advice to people thinking about converting is to study hard and stick with it , Islam is a beautiful way of life and you will thank yourself at the end , people learn to accept you for you and if . they don�t then you may realise who your family and friends are

Holy Quran ٨ : ٤

These are the believers in truth; they shall have

. from their Lord exalted grades and forgiveness and an honorable sustenance

ANTOINETTE AZIM

What can I say , Allah (swt) called me to Islam . It seemed to happen so fast , only ٢٨ days passed since I opened my heart to Islam and when I said Shahadah , the happiest day of my life . I grew up in a Catholic family , not just Catholic in name , but practicing also . I went to a Catholic grade school , went to church on a consistent basis , and said my prayers every night . My mother always hoped for me to become a nun , that was her dream before she met my dad , and I was the youngest of four girls . I thought I was a good Catholic too . I believed . I prayed . But I didn�t agree with everything in my religion , which to me seemed ok , it was enough to believe in God , but I also believe in divorce , I don�t agree with the church hierarchy , and I don�t like the fact that there is a priest between God and me . But I was brought up Catholic . and that was the way it was always going to be

I lived in Russia for two years teaching English . When I was there I went to a Catholic service twice . It was four hours long and they told me I needed to go to confession before I could take communion

These were believers , that wasn�t for me . I got no spiritual fulfilment from the . Russian Orthodox Church even though the icons are beautiful . When I came back after two years of not going to church I thought my faith was renewed . The first time I went I actually listened to the Gospel . I continued to go and even found a church when I moved out to DC . I always said I was part German , Polish , Irish and Belgian , ! but one hundred percent Catholic

Then I met Mounir . This changed my life in many ways , some good , mostly bad , now that I look back I understand that I had to go through all of this to get to the Truth . Mounir is from Morocco . On our first date he told me about the five pillars of Islam while drinking an Amstel light . I didn�t think anything of the Amstel light , but I thought telling me about the five pillars of Islam on a first date is strange . In order to understand my Muslim boyfriend I wanted to understand Islam . I bought a book , and at the same time I bought a book about Catholicism , I wanted to get closer to my . faith too

I didn�t get into Islam right away , but I started asking a lot of questions . I spent five weeks in Russia that summer . When I came home I

discovered that Mounir didn�t miss me as much as I missed him . The break up was devastating to me , so much that I didn�t even realize what I was really going through at the time . My only consolation was drinking and partying . I still went to church during this time , but I couldn�t find the spirituality I needed to get me through this without losing all my self-respect . Meanwhile , I studied Islam a little more , but to me it was purely academic . I decided to declare it as my minor in graduate school and started studying Islamic fundamentalism in Central Asia . But I .thought the more I study Islam , the more I need to study Catholicism

Come spring semester I signed up for the class Conflict Resolution in Islamic Studies with Professor Abdul Aziz Said . One day he gave us a copy of the Noble Qur�an . I couldn�t believe it ! I was so excited that I had a copy of the Qur�an . I had never read the Bible . I took it home but didn�t start reading it right away . I started talking with a Moroccan at work . He started to tell me certain Surahs to read and then he said that once you start digging into Islam you can�t stop . I just laughed and assured him that I was very secure in my Catholic beliefs . In order to make myself believe that I started to

. research Catholicism . It was short lived though

One day all of this changed . I was doing some tabling at the university to get some support for our human rights group . Another girl from the organization , Mandy , came with me . I knew her , but not that well . As we sat there for two hours I discovered that she was a Muslim , she converted from Catholicism . When she told me this , I started to feel like maybe it was ok , the feelings that I was having , I�m not alone . After that I started reading the Qur�an . It was beautiful . Two weeks later I went to the mosque with her for Friday prayer . I�ll never forget her tying the scarf on my head for the first time and teaching me how to say �salaam aleykom . � I felt an incredible sense of unity with the women there . I kept reading the Qur�an , it is so logical , it fills in the gaps that Christianity had , it answered the questions . I knew I couldn�t give up drinking and partying . I read about Muslim women on the Internet and discovered the Muslim dress and got scared ! That wasn�t for me , I . couldn�t give up my shorts and skirts

Mandy left and went to New York for six weeks . I stopped drinking , kind of as an experiment , also because I was tired of

making mistakes when I was intoxicated . It wasn�t hard at all . It came easy , I didn�t miss drinking , I didn�t miss feeling intoxicated , I felt great . Not only that , but things I thought were impossible at first started to make sense , like dressing modestly , praying five times a day; it became fulfilling . I realized the more you sacrifice , the closer you are to the Creator . Before I thought it was enough just to believe , but now I understand that in order to be close to God I need to live my life the . way He intended

Two weeks after my first visit to the mosque I had a Friday off of work , something that never happens . I decided to go to Friday prayer by myself . I don�t know what force took me there , but I went . There was Sohair from Egypt . She was so excited to see me back . She showed me how to perform ablution and how to pray . After prayer we went down for lunch and she introduced me to Hayat . I�ll never forget that conversation . She asked me why I was there and what was holding me back . I started crying , I couldn�t hold it in , and I didn�t even know why I was crying . She took my hand and said , �It�s ok , Allah calls whom he wants . � Those words changed

. my life

I went home after that and was in a cloud for the rest of the day . I started praying that day . It was March ٢ , ٢٠٠١ . I was helping my friend move and as we were driving it just hit me that Allah (swt) had called ME . The feeling of peace from that moment on was so incredible . I continued to go to Friday prayer , this time at AU . The first day I walked out of the prayer room and Yasmin , the president of the MSA , was standing there waiting for me . She was so excited that I was there and started asking me questions . I knew that I believed in the Oneness of God and Mohammed his Prophet ! (pbuh) , but I didn�t know what to do with this belief � I was CATHOLIC

I went to talk to a priest , he was very nice , but didn�t know much about Islam . He told me that Catholics respect Muslims because they are people of the book . I left feeling good because I hadn�t wavered in my belief , after all , I was quoting from . the Qur�an to a priest . But the biggest test was telling my mother

I called her on a Sunday night . I was so scared . I was trying to convince myself that it . would be easier just to stay Catholic than to have to tell my mother about this

But I knew that I had found the Truth and there was no turning back now . I knew it would be hard for her , but I was so happy to have found the Way and so filled with peace I didn�t understand how someone could NOT be happy for me and embrace Islam themselves . She was shocked , to say the least , but I don�t blame her at all , she didn�t know anything about Islam and was brought up to believe that Christianity was the only way . After a long conversation she agreed to get a copy of �their book� as she called it , so it was a step in the right direction . That whole week I was dreading what would happen . I was so worried that she was going to tell me I wasn�t her daughter anymore . A week later , it seemed a lot longer , I called her back . I was very reassured that she still loved me and wasn�t going to disown me . She said that she had to talk to a devout Catholic who teaches world religions at a college in our hometown . At first I panicked , but then I was reassured that it would be ok . I believe that Islam is the Straight Path and Allah (swt) would make my mom .understand

Two days later I got an email from Mom saying that Brian had emailed her and told her that Islam was not

a pagan religion , but deeply rooted in Judaism and Christianity . At that moment I felt ready to declare my faith . I was planning on doing it April ۶ , but then the open prayer date got pushed back to April ۱۳ . I knew that I couldn�t wait that long but I wanted all of my friends to be there . I was at Jumah prayer at AU and afterwards Yasmin told me that I could talk to the Imam about the life of the Prophet (pbuh) if I wanted . We started talking . I asked him questions and then he started to ask me questions . After two hours he told me that I was ready and very strong in my faith . He didn�t pressure me to say Shahadah , but told me that we don�t know what could happen tomorrow . I still said that I wanted to wait because of my friends . We continued to talk and then I said that I was ready . Right at that moment Yasmin walked in , the timing could have only been Allah (swt) . I�ll never forget that moment , repeating the words after the imam , it was the most beautiful moment of my life . Yasmin and I were crying and then the imam started crying , I can�t describe how much that touched me . The peace that came over my body and soul was more than words can say . My heart is so

full , Insha Allah it will always be this way . I said Shahadah again two weeks later in front of my friends . The actual words did not move me as much that time , but afterward I felt like I was even more ready to accept a life of Islam , the way Allah .wants . When I pray I feel so close to Him

As I pray every day I pray that Allah (swt) will guide me and keep me on the Straight Path , and I�ll do my part to follow Him in every way . My goal is to educate people about Islam and to wipe away the damage that the US media and US foreign policy have created . I realize that I am very lucky to have the support from my friends and family that I have , not all converts have this . Islam is so beautiful , so loving , it accepts everybody , every religion . Insha Allah I can help people to see the beauty of .Islam the way that I do

Holy Quran ١١ : ١٢٠

And all we relate to you of the accounts of the apostles is to strengthen your heart therewith; and in this has come to you the truth and an admonition , and a reminder to .the believers

BROTHER YUSUF

Since I was a little boy (I am ٣١ now) I was always very Christian . Although my family were torn apart with sectarianism since my Mother was of an

Irish Catholic family and my Father of Scottish/Irish orange Lodge Protestant . They fought so much over religion that my brother was baptised protestant and I was baptised Catholic . This caused a great divide because it meant we went to separate schools – we were even given different names since my Father declared that any son of his who was Catholic could never have his name – therefore I was given my . Mother�s maiden name as my surname

When I was older I joined a monastery and trained to be a Catholic Monk (a Priest) and lived in Dublin Ireland for three years . The Monks are very strict and we were not allowed to leave , in fact it was so strict that mirrors were banned and we dug our graves with a spoon , a little every day to teach us humility . We could only speak half an hour each day and had no access to the outside world , even our mail was censored . They say that austerity is a way to God and although I do not agree with . this way of life – it does make you more spiritual and has certain benefits

Because these days people of this generation do not join these monasteries , they gave the younger people a few concessions . We could leave for half days once a month but only to go to certain places with our leaders . So I was taken to the Mosque in ١٩٩٩ to try and

talk to the Muslims into becoming Christian but they immediately invited us for dinner and were so very kind and gave me a Koran and other books . This started my interest .

Later that year I became Muslim and left the monastery , with no job , no place to live , nothing . When living there , I had to take a vow of poverty so they owned everything I had . They even assigned my Pension benefits to them ! Eventually I came back to the UK and am happy here living near London , in Berkshire (but could be much happier) . I�m finding it hard to settle because I�m working in the Finance world . which I feel I was never meant to do but Alhamdulilah

I only found Shia Islam recently and this was through a very kind brother and Sister at the website convertstoislam . com . I was never told about Shia before in fact most Muslims I knew became angry at the name even . I am happier and much more contented and peaceful the Shia way and feel much more satisfied generally . . Alhamidilah all is well with me and Allah has been very kind to me

I know I have a long way to go and much to learn but Inshallah Allah will make it easy . for me

I am a bit worried about the Sunni brothers and the really deep hatred they have for shias in fact I�m really scared to tell them ! They

are so kind yet this word �shia� makes them like savages – it brings up such conflict ., the like of which I have not seen since I was a child – with Protestants and Catholics

I don�t know much about politics but I know a lot of the nature of God thanks to my .time as a Christian

.Inshallah , may Allah bless you all

Holy Quran ١٣ : ١

Alif Lam Mim Ra . These are the verses of the Book; and that which is revealed to you .from your Lord is the truth , but most people do not believe

ABDUR RAHMAN

(FORMERLY �STEWART HUMES� AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINAL)

.I would like to go back in time and tell you a little bit about my history

My culture is one of the oldest cultures in the world . I love creation . The history of aboriginal people , we connect so close to the Earth , that we are like the Earth . In my younger days as a child I grew up knowing about the mysteries and spirits , that everything that is made in creation has a spirit , a formed spirit , that guides it and .looks after it and also guides us

When we walked night and day in the bush or wherever , we knew that there was a spirit , a powerful God , that looked over us , all the time . Then as I grew up I went to , high school , was taken away to high school

then I met this other God , same God but in a different form , had to go to Church and pray . I also learnt about racism , I was taken and put in a hostel with about ١٨٠ children , ٩٠ boys and ٩٠ girls . It was frightening really in a way because I didn�t know anybody and I didn�t know what to expect , but I stayed there for three years , and in that three years I learnt about God , Jesus and I learnt about other races . I learnt how to be hurtful , I learnt how to make people cry and it was sad really because where I come from , we were all sort of one , the white children and the black . children grew up together , sort of as one family

I left high school and then I went back home . I worked and then I wanted to know God more . I got baptized in the Church of England and I wanted to know more about God , so I read the Bible a bit , and had meetings with people and I still had my Aboriginal God too , spirits , and it was very hard to know that there is this other God , ? that is the same God you know

Anyway , I went to heaps of Churches . I went to the Catholic Church , the Methodists� Church , and every Church that came from England , every

church that came from America , I was a part of it . I went from one Church to another , trying to find this God . In ١٩٦٧ I went to the University of Western Australia , that�s . where I met Brother Mohammed Rais

Brother Rais is a Muslim (revert) now . Anyway I knew that I had to find something because I became kind of ruff , for ten years , I became like a madman , I�m only small but I�ve done some things , some real bad things , and I needed to find a God , so I tried again , I went to people , to houses , people would slam doors on your face . I was a person , I had a hard life , I wanted everything to change for myself , so anyway I struggled on in life . I used to read the Bible to people , people used to come to me and ask me questions and I�d be out there talking about God and Jesus and I�d be fighting the next day . I would think why am I doing these things , when I know ? there�s someone more powerful , a God , that can help me

So I was like in a washing machine , I was tumbling around , good times then the bad etc . I said I don�t want this , I want more good times in my life . I�d give talks at schools , and

I�d tell children what to do and I wanted a better life for myself . So anyway , I met this lady . We were together for a while , then we fought , then we�d get back together again . Then we started looking into Muslims . I was with the lady that I�m now with , and I was going to the Seventh Day Adventist Church , one day a week . Then my family would come along and I�d go to the Jehovah Witnesses . I was a . little mixed up as to where I was

So anyway we went for a drive around and tried to find a Mosque . We went to one Mosque and I think it was the right time for me . We went away and we met another brother . The lady I�m with rang up one Brother and they said �Oh yes come around� so we went around and anyway his sister was home and he said can you wait outside and she�ll talk to your missus . And I thought this was a bit strange , because any other time everybody piles into the house , and don�t care less . Anyway , I was waiting outside . My missus spoke to the lady and her sister and we left . Then we were invited back again , and this time the Brother was there . We spoke to the brother , he was a very nice brother , and he told us as

much as he could at that time about Islam , and about being a Muslim . I had about ten . cups of tea ! It was nice , and his wife was very nice

So anyway we went to Thornlie Mosque , I was wandering around there and I met this brother and he said �I know you� and I said �You know me� and it was Brother Rais back from university in ١٩٦٧ . He was there . I remember I was at my Mum�s once and she got burnt and she was in hospital and he took me to the hospital to meet her . I nearly cried because he was such a nice person at the , university , and I hadn�t seen him for so long

and I met some of the other brothers . I felt good you know , it was all men , ladies . were one side and we were just having a yarn

I�m not trying to put other churches down , but I feel this one . I feel better . When you�ve got the ladies and men altogether , you don�t know what�s going on , a lot of things happen in Churches . When you are with the brothers you know where you are , you find a place where you belong , and I felt that this is what I want , what I need in my life . So I went there for a time , and I said well I want to

. do this for myself , and I become a Muslim

In the Quran , I hadn�t forgotten Jesus and the Prophets . I haven�t forgotten the followers of Allah , because they are all still in there . What I read in the Bible is still . here in the Quran , and it makes me happy , it makes me feel good

Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) is something I need in my life . I read about his life , . things he�d done and I feel free now , much freer than I used to feel

I used to go to the Churches and I don�t know what sort of under arm I used to wear but nobody used to sit next to me . I said �gee� and I felt a little bit shy , but I didn�t worry . I don�t care what people are , I love them , because the Creator made them . He managed to love everybody and if you can�t love somebody with . your heart , you can�t love Allah

. Allah created all things for all of us to enjoy , and I love creation

When I look at creation , I see beauty . I see life . If you laugh with somebody , then . someone�s laughing with you

. So I�d like to thank everybody for listening to what I�ve had to say

Holy Quran ۴۶ : ۴

Say : Have you considered what you call upon besides Allah ? Show me what they have created of

the earth , or have they a share in the heavens ? Bring me a book before this or traces . of knowledge , if you are truthful

BROTHER YUSUF ESTES

part ١

My name is Yusuf Estes and I am the National Muslim Chaplain for American Muslims , sponsored by a number of organizations here in Washington , DC . As such , I travel around the entire world lecturing and sharing the message of the Christ of the Quran in Islam . We hold dialogs and discussion groups with all faiths and enjoy the opportunity to work alongside of rabbis , ministers , preachers and priests everywhere . Most of our work is in the institutional area , military , universities and prisons . Primarily our goal is to educate and communicate the correct message of Islam and who the Muslims really are . Although Islam has grown now to tie Christianity as the largest of religions on earth , we see many of those who claim Islam as Muslims , that do not correctly understand nor properly represent the . (�message of �Peace , Surrender and Obedience to God� (Arabic = �Islam

Dear me , I am afraid that I got a bit ahead of myself , I was trying to give a bit of background on my own personal experience to see if it would in anyway benefit you in your ministry . This may seem quite strange that I would offer to help you , while we perhaps share a few different perspectives and concepts of

God , Jesus , prophethood , sin and salvation . But you see , at one time I was in the .same boat as you . Really , I was . Let me explain

I was born into a very strong Christian family in the Midwest . Our family and their ancestors not only built the churches and schools across this land , but actually were the same ones who came here in the first place . While I was still in elementary we relocated in Houston , Texas in ١٩٤٩ (I�m old) . We attended church regularly and I was baptized at the age of ١٢ in Pasadena , Texas . As a teenager , I wanted to visit other churches to learn more of their teachings and beliefs . The Baptists , Methodists , Episcopalians , Charismatic movements , Nazarene , Church of Christ , Church of God , Church of God in Christ , Full Gospel , Agape , Catholic , Presbyterian and many more . I developed quite a thirst for the �Gospel� or as we say; �Good News . � My research into religion did not stop with Christianity . Not at all . Hinduism , Judaism , Buddhism , Metaphysics , native American beliefs were all a part of my studies . Just about the only one that I did not look into seriously was �Islam� . Why ? Good .question

Anyway , I became very interested in different types of music , especially Gospel and Classical . Because

my whole family was religious and musical it followed that I too would begin my studies in both areas . All this set me for the logical position of Music Minister in many of the churches that I became affiliated with over the years . I started teaching keyboard instruments in ١٩٦٠ and by ١٩٦٣ owned my own studios in Laurel , Maryland , called �Estes Music Studios . �

Over the next ٣٠ years my father and I worked together in many business projects . We had entertainment programs , shows and attractions . We opened piano and organ stores all the way from Texas and Oklahoma to Florida . I made millions of dollars in those years , but could not find the peace of mind that can only come through knowing the truth and finding the real plan of salvation . I�m sure you have asked yourself the question; �Why did God create me ? � or �What is it that God wants me to do ? � or �Exactly who is God , anyway ? � �Why do we believe in �original sin ? � and �Why would the sons of Adam be forced to accept his �sins� and then as a result be punished forever . But if you asked anyone these questions , they would probably tell you that you have to believe without asking , or that it is a �mystery� and you shouldn�t ask .

And then there is the concept of the �Trinity . � If I would

ask preachers or ministers to give me some sort of an idea how �one� could figure out to become �three� or how God Himself , Who can do anything He Wills to do , cannot just forgive people�s sins , but rather and had to become a man , come down on earth , be a human , and then take on the sins of all people . Keeping in mind that all along He is still God of the whole universe and does as He Wills to do , both in and . outside of the universe as we know it

Then one day in ١٩٩١ , I came to know that the Muslims believed in the Bible . I was : shocked . How could this be ? But that�s not all , they believe in Jesus as

;a true messenger of God

;prophet of God

;miracle birth without human intervention

;he was the �Christ� or Messiah as predicted in the Bible

;he is with God now and most important

. He will be coming back in the Last Days to lead the believers against the �Antichrist �

This was too much for me . Especially since the evangelists that we used to travel around with all hated Muslims and Islam very much . They even said things that were not true to make people afraid of Islam . So , why would I want anything to do with ? these people

My father was very active in supporting church work , especially church school programs . He became an ordained minister

in the ١٩٧٠s . He and his wife (my stepmother) knew many of the TV evangelists and preachers and even visited Oral Roberts and helped in the building of the �Prayer Tower� in Tulsa , OK . They also were strong supporters of Jimmy Swaggart , Jim and Tammy Fae Bakker , Jerry Fallwell , John Haggi and the biggest enemy to Islam in . America , Pat Robertson

Dad and his wife worked together and were most active in recording �Praise� tapes and distributing them for free to people in retirement homes , hospitals and homes for the elderly . And then in ١٩٩١ he began doing business with a man from Egypt and told me that he wanted me to meet him . This idea appealed to me when I thought about the idea of having an international flavor . You know , the pyramids , sphinx , Nile River � . and all that . Then my father mentioned that this man was a �Moslem

. I couldn�t believe my ears

� ? A �Moslem

! No way

I reminded my dad of the various different things that we had heard about these � people , how they are

? Terrorists; hijackers; kidnappers; bombers and who knows what else

: Not only that but

They don�t believe in God

They kiss the ground five times a day and

. They worship a black box in the desert

! No

! I did not want to meet this �Moslem� man . No way

My father insisted that I meet him and reassured me that he was

. a very nice person . So , I gave in and agreed to the meeting

. But on my terms

I agreed to meet him on a Sunday after church so we would be all prayed up and in good standing with the Lord . I would be carrying my Bible under my arm as usual . I would have my big shiny cross dangling and I would have on my cap which says : �Jesus is Lord� right across the front . My wife and two young daughters came � . along and we were ready for our first encounter with the �Moslems

When I came into the shop and asked my father where the �Moslem� was , he � . pointed and said : �He�s right over there

. I was confused . That couldn�t be the Moslem . No way

I�m looking for a huge man with flowing robes and big turban on his head , a beard . half way down his shirt and eyebrows that go all the way across his forehead

part ٢

This man had no beard . In fact , he didn�t even have any hair on his head at all . He was very close to bald . And he was very pleasant with a warm welcome and handshake . This didn�t make sense . I thought they are terrorists and bombers . ? What is this all about

Never mind . I�ll get right to work on this guy . He needs to be �saved� and me and the Lord are going

. to do it

: So , after a quick introduction , I asked him

� ? Do you believe in God�

� . He said : �Yes

(! Good)

� ? Then I said : �Do you believe in Adam and Eve

� . He said : �Yes

I said : �What about Abraham ? You believe in him and how he tried to sacrifice his � ? son for God

� . He said : �Yes

� ? Then I asked : �What about Moses

� ? Ten Commandments�

� ? Parting the Red Sea�

� . Again he said : �Yes

� ? Then : �What about the other prophets , David , Solomon and John the Baptist

� . He said : �Yes

� ? I asked : �Do you believe in the Bible

� . Again , he said : �Yes

: So , now it was time for the big question

� ? Do you believe in Jesus ? That he was the Messiah (Christ) of God�

� . Again the said : �Yes

Well now this was going to be easier than I had thought . He was just about ready to . be baptized only he didn�t know it

. And I was just the one to do it , too

I was winning souls to the Lord day after day and this would be a big achievement for . me , to catch one of these �Moslems� and �convert� him to Christianity

I asked him if he liked tea and he said he did . So off we went to a little shop in the mall to sit

. and talk about my favorite subject : Beliefs

While we sat in that little coffee shop for hours talking (I did most of the talking) I came to know that he was very nice , quiet and even a bit shy . He listened attentively to every word that I had to say and did not interrupt even one time . I liked this . man�s way and thought that he had definite potential to become a good Christian

. Little did I know the course of events about to unravel in front of my eyes

First of all , I agreed with my father that we should do business with this man and even encouraged the idea of him travelling along with me on my business trips across the northern part of Texas . Day after day we would ride together and discuss various issues pertaining to different beliefs that people have . And along the way , I could of course interject some of my favorite radio programs of worship and praise to help bring the message to this poor individual . We talked about the concept of God; the meaning of life; the purpose of creation; the prophets and their mission and how God reveals His Will to mankind . We also shared a lot of personal experiences and ideas . as well

One day I came to know that my friend Mohamed was going to move out of the home he have been sharing with a friend of his and was going to be

living in the mosque for a time . I went to my dad and asked him if we could invite Mohamed to come out to our big home in the country and stay there with us . After all , he could share some of the work and some expenses and he would be right there when we were ready to go to out travelling around . My father agreed and Mohamed moved in .

Of course I still would find time to visit my fellow preachers and evangelists around the state of Texas . One of them lived on the Texas -- Mexico border and another lived near the Oklahoma border . One preacher liked to carry a huge wooden cross that was bigger than a car . He would carry it over his shoulder and drag the bottom on the ground and go down the road or freeway hauling these two beams formed in the shape of a cross . People would stop their cars and come over to him and ask him what was going on and he would give them pamphlets and booklets on Christianity .

One day my friend with the cross had a heart attack and had to go to the Veterans Hospital where he stayed for quite a long while . I used to visit him in the hospital several times a week and I would take Mohamed with me with the hopes that we could all share together in the subject of beliefs and religions . My friend was

not very impressed and it was obvious that he did not want to know anything about Islam . Then one day a man who was sharing the room with my friend came rolling into the room in his wheelchair . I went to him and asked him his name and he said that it didn�t matter and when I asked him where he was from he said he was from the planet Jupiter . I thought about what he said and then began to wonder if I was in . the cardiac ward or the mental ward

I knew the man was lonely and depressed and needed someone in his life . So , I began to �witness� to him about the Lord . I read to him out of the book of Jonah in the Old Testament . I shared the story of the prophet Jonah who had been sent by the Lord to call his people to the correct way . Jonah had left his people and escaped by boat to leave his city and head out to sea . A storm came up and the ship almost capsized and the people on board threw Jonah over the side of the ship . A whale came up to the surface and grabbed Jonah , swallowed him and then went down to the bottom of the sea , where he stayed for three days and three nights . Yet because of God�s Mercy , He caused the whale to rise to the surface and then

spit Jonah out to return back home safely to his city of Nineveh . And the idea was that we can�t really run away from our problems because we always know what we have . done . And what is more , God also always knows what we have done

After sharing this story with the man in the wheel chair , he looked up and me and apologized . He told me he was sorry for his rude behavior and that he had experienced some real serious problems recently . Then he said that he wanted to confess something to me . And I said that I was not a Catholic priest and I don�t handle confessions . He replied back to me that he knew that . In fact , he said : �I am � . a Catholic priest

I was shocked . Here I had been trying to preach Christianity to a priest . What in the ? world was happening here

The priest began to share his story of being a missionary for the church for over ١٢ years to south and Central America and Mexico and even in New York�s �Hell�s Kitchen . � When he was released from the hospital he needed a place to go to recover and rather than let him go to stay with a Catholic family , I told my dad that we should invite him to come out and live with us in the country along with our families and Mohamed . It was agreed by

. all that he would so , he moved out right away

During the trip out to our home , I talked with the priest about some of the concepts of beliefs in Islam and to my surprise he agreed and then shared even more about this with me . I was shocked when he told me that Catholic priests actually study Islam and some even carry doctors degrees in this subject . This was all very enlightening to . me . But there was still a lot more to come

After settling in , we all began to gather around the kitchen table after dinner every night to discuss religion . My father would bring his King James Version of the Bible , I would bring out my Revised Standard Version of the Bible , my wife had another version of the Bible (maybe something like Jimmy Swaggart�s �Good News For Modern Man . � The priest of course , had the Catholic Bible which has ٧ more books in it that the Protestant Bible . So we spent more time talking about which Bible was the right one or the most correct one , than we did trying to convince Mohamed about . becoming a Christian

At one point I recall asking him about the Quran and how many versions of it there were in the last ١ , ٤٠٠ years . He told me that there was only ONE QURAN . And that it had never been changed . Yet he let me know that

the Quran had been memorized by hundreds of thousands of people , in it�s entirety and were scattered about the earth in many different countries . Over the centuries since the Quran was revealed millions have memorized it completely and have taught it to others who have memorized it completely , from cover to cover , letter perfect . without mistakes

part ٣

This did not seem possible to me . After all , the original languages of the Bible have all been dead languages for centuries and the documents themselves have been lost in their originals for hundreds and thousands of years . So , how could it be that . something like this could be so easy to preserve and to recite from cover to cover

Anyway , one day the priest asked Mohamed if he might accompany him to the mosque to see what it was like there . They came back talking about their experience there and we could not wait to ask the priest what it was like and what all types of ceremonies they performed . He said they didn�t really �do� anything . They just came and prayed and left . I said : �They left ? Without any speeches or singing ? � . He said that was right

A few more days went by and the Catholic priest asked Mohamed if he might join him again for a trip to the mosque which they did . But this time it was different . They did not come back for a

very long time . It became dark and we worried that something might have happened to them . Finally they arrived and when they came in the door I immediately recognized Mohamed , but who was this alongside of him ? Someone wearing a white robe and a white cap . Hold on a minute ! It was the priest . I said to him : �Pete ? -- � ? Did you become a �Moslem

He said that he had entered into Islam that very day . THE PRIEST BECAME A MUSLIM . (! ! What next ? (You�ll see

So , I went upstairs to think things over a bit and began to talk to my wife about the whole subject . She then told me that she too was going to enter into Islam , because she knew it was the truth . I was really shocked now . I went downstairs and woke up Mohamed and asked him to come outside with me for a discussion . We walked and talked that whole night through . By the time he was ready to pray Fajr (the morning prayer of the Muslims) I knew that the truth had come at last and now it was up to me to do my part . I went out back behind my father�s house and found an old piece of plywood lying under an overhang and right there I put my head down on the ground facing the direction that the Muslims pray five times a day

.

Now then in that position , with my body stretched out on the plywood and my head on the ground , I asked : �O God . If you are there , guide me , guide me . � And then after a while I raised up my head and I noticed something . No , I didn�t see birds or angels coming out of the sky nor did I hear voices or music , nor did I see bright lights and flashes . What I did notice was a change inside of me . I was aware now more than ever before that it was time for me to stop lying and cheating and doing sneaky business deals . It was time that I really work at being an honest and upright man . I knew now what I had to do . So I went upstairs and took a shower with the distinct idea that I was �washing� away the sinful old person that I had become over the years . And I was now coming into a new , fresh life . A life based on truth and proof .

Around ١١ : ٠٠ A . M . that morning , I stood before two witnesses , one the ex-priest , formerly known as Father Peter Jacob�s , and the other Mohamed Abel Rehman and announced my �shahadah� (open testimony to the Oneness of God and the prophethood of Muhammad , peace be upon him) .

A few minutes later , my wife followed

along and gave the same testimony . But hers was in front of three witnesses (me being the third) .

My father was a bit more reserved on the subject and waited a few more months before he made his shahadah (public testimony) . But he did finally commit to Islam and began offering prayers right along with me and the other Muslims in the local masjid (mosque) .

The children were taken out of the Christian school and placed in Muslim schools . And now ten years later , they are memorizing much of the Quran and the teachings of Islam .

My father�s wife was the last of all to acknowledge that Jesus could not be a son of God and that he must have been a mighty prophet of God , but not God .

Now stop and think . A whole entire household of people from varying backgrounds and ethnic groups coming together in truth to learn how to know and worship the Creator and Sustainer of the Universe . Think . A Catholic priest . A minister of music and preacher . An ordained minister and builder of Christian schools . And they all come into Islam ! Only by His Mercy were we all guided to see the real truth of Islam without any blinders on their eyes any longer .

If I were to stop right here , I�m sure that you would have to admit that at least , this is an amazing story , right ? After all , three religious

leaders of three separate denominations all going into one very opposite belief at the
. same time and then soon after the rest of the household

But that is not all . There is more ! The same year , while I was in Grand Prairie , Texas (near Dallas) I met a Baptist seminary student from Tennessee named Joe , who also ! came to Islam after reading the Holy Quran while in BAPTIST SEMINARY COLLEGE

There are others as well . I recall the case of the Catholic priest in a college town who talked about the good things in Islam so much that I was forced to ask him why he didn�t enter Islam . He replied : �What ? And loose my job ? � - His name is Father . John and there is still hope for him yet

More ? Yes . The very next year I met a former Catholic priest who had been a missionary for ٨ years in Africa . He learned about Islam while he was there and . entered into Islam . He then changed his name to Omar and moved to Dallas Texas

Any more ? Again , yes . Two years later , while in San Antonio , Texas I was introduced to a former Arch Bishop of the Orthodox Church of Russia who learned . about Islam and gave up his position to enter Islam

And since my own entrance into Islam and becoming a chaplain to the Muslims throughout the country and around the world

I have encountered many more individuals who were leaders , teachers and scholars , in other religions who learned about Islam and entered into it . They came from Hindus , Jews , Catholics , Protestants , Jehovah�s Witnesses , Greek and Russian Orthodox , Coptic Christians from Egypt , non-denominational churches and even scientists who had been atheists .

Why ? Good question .

May I suggest to the seeker of truth do the following NINE STEPS to purification of the mind :

۱.) Clean their mind , their heart and their soul real good .

۲.) Clear away all the prejudices and biases

۳.) Read a good translation of the meaning of the Holy Quran in a language that they can understand best .

۴.) Take some time .

۵.) Read and reflect .

۶.) Think and pray .

۷.) And keep on asking the One who created you in the first place , to guide you to the truth .

۸.) Keep this up for a few months . And be regular in it .

۹.) Above all , do not let others who are poisoned in their thinking influence you while you are in this state of �rebirth of the soul . �

The rest is between you and the Almighty Lord of the Universe . If you truly love Him , then He already Knows it and He will deal with each of us according to our hearts .

So , now you have the introduction to the story of my coming into Islam and becoming Muslim . There is more on the Internet about this story and there are more pictures

there as well . Please take the time to visit it and then please take the time to email me and let us come together to share in all truths based on proofs for understanding our . origins and our purpose and goals in this life and the Next Life

May Allah guide you on your journey to all truth . Ameen . And May He open your heart . and your mind to the reality of this world and the purpose of this life , ameen

Peace to you and Guidance from Allah the One Almighty God , Creator and Sustainer . of all that exists

, Your friend

Chaplain Yusuf Estes

Holy Quran ١٥ : ٥٥

. They said : We give you good news with truth , therefore be not of the despairing

BROTHER AHMAD

part ١

Twenty Year Search begins a Lifelong Journey

It seems like I have always been a Muslim . I cannot recall ever believing that any other than Allah created the universe . I used to stare at the sky , animals , trees , etc and just marvel at how magnificent and great the Creator of all of these things must be . The only problem that I had with religion as an adolescent and young adult was that I was not mature enough to accept that complete submission to the Creator was necessary . My own desires came first . �What do I want , and how do I get it ? � was my primary concern . Throughout other experiences later , I came to

understand that my own knowledge was infinitesimally small and that it was my . Creator , Allah , alone who possesses all knowledge and who has power of all things

When I was in sixth grade , my oldest brother became a �born again Christian� at Immanuel�s Temple in Lansing , Michigan . He used to try to get all of us to go to church and �praise God� with him . I remember being asked once when his girlfriend was spending the night at our house , �Do you accept Jesus Christ as your lord and savior ? � I don�t remember what my exact reply was , but I remember saying something to the effect that I believed that Jesus� life was an excellent example of piety but that God alone was my Creator and that I was unable to accept that Jesus was , in fact , God . She seemed content enough to hear that I did indeed love Jesus and went on explaining how that meant I was saved from the fire , and on . and on

At the time , I was probably eleven years old . I started reading the bible with my brother from time to time , but I noticed that I had insights and questions about the passages we would study that he could not answer . I looked through the index and table of contents voraciously , thinking that I would find more references to all of the , topics that were important to me

but the verses that I was directed to were always inadequate . In short , I observed .that the book was not very well put together

I remember thinking , �this does not seem at all like what the Creator of the universe would choose to tell His creations . � Why , for example , in the opening passage in John , would He spend so much time discussing a genealogy ? Why did Genesis sound so contrived ? Why did Revelations and Acts appear to be so inconsistent with other parts of the book ? What was all that symbolism and apocalyptic chatter mean ? Who was supposed to be impressed ? No , I did not accept that this book was from God , at least not entirely . Some of what I read moved me , but most of it was more boring .and senseless than a ٢٠٠٠ page comic book

There were only two times when my brother convinced me to attend church with him . All that I saw were people there trying to make themselves feel good about their own pathetic shortcomings . The preaching lacked sophistication . He kept claiming that he possessed all types of powers due to Jesus Christ . He kept trying to convince the congregation , and himself , that what he was saying was true . I thought , �what a quack . � The best message in the world can never reach its intended target if the messenger�s approach is inadequate

.

I wondered why all of those people at the church picked up the hymn books and opened up their bibles to the pages that the minister instructed them to read . How was it that he got away with making so many comments without being questioned ? How come everyone was following what he was saying and not looking at other parts of the bible that clearly contradicted what he was saying ? I did not want to sell myself short by allowing him to stand in the way of me becoming acquainted with my Creator , but since I had already turned to and away from the bible , I concluded that those . people were content with suspending their intellect and reasoning ability

They accepted what they were feed , and because their beliefs taught them that despite their poor qualities and severely deficient characters they were still loved by God , they never looked elsewhere ? If you believe that God loves you as a wretch the same way that he loves you as a pious person , then why would you ever change your beliefs ? If you believed that Jesus died for your sins , then why would you stop ? sinning

My quest for knowledge continued throughout high school . I read Plato and Aristotle . I studied Greek and Roman mythology . I looked at contemporary thinkers and philosophers like Bertrand Russell , Nietzsche , Freud , C . S . Jung and others . I tried to get into

Thoreau , Emerson , other writers and other poets , mostly white Americans . I attempted to find some substance and depth in Black American writers like Toni Morrison , James Baldwin , Langston Hughes , Maya Angelou and others . In each of the different personalities , I found some elements that interested me and others that did not , but I was not impressed with any of them enough to make me think that what .they knew was worth knowing

During my first year of college , I started reading about Taoism (Daoism) , Buddhism , Hinduism , Shintoism and Confucianism . Again , there were interesting elements and not so interesting elements . What path was I on and how would I know when I got there ? Desiring to learn more about the African experience that I felt disconnected from , I transferred to another university for my second year to begin an African Studies major . I studied black social scientists and historians like DuBois , Diop and Senghor in class , and revolutionaries like Marcus Garvey , Malcolm X , Steve Biko , .Walter Rodney and Amilcar Cabral , out of class

part ٢

I started to get absorbed into the �struggle;� the plight of African and descendants of Africa in world dominated by Western hegemony . I revisited the injustices of the transatlantic slave trade and plantation enterprises in the Americas . I compared the plight of Blacks in the United States with Africans living in post-colonial (neocolonial) Africa

and I was determined to unite the oppressed under a banner of pan-Africanism ., Several friends and I founded a small group that we called , Africa�s Progeny for Global Power (APGP) . We were devoted to enlightening and empowering our �people� around the world , the Caribbean , Latin America , North America , Europe ., Asia , and of course , Africa . We were sharp , results-oriented and focused

I decided that I had to visit Africa in order to begin to actualize my dreams . I applied for a scholarship that I eventually won to study at the University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania . A few months later , with no second thoughts , I was on a plane headed back to the �motherland . � People told me that living in Africa would change my way of thinking profoundly . I replied that my most fundamental beliefs could never change , but admitted that the superfluous activities would probably vanish forever . What did I feel most committed to at that time ? Ironically , I was committed to serving my Creator , but the difference between then and now is that I felt my own manner of serving Him was adequate . I thought I was left free to worship on my terms . Later I realized worship has to come on the terms of the Worshipped , not on the terms of the worshipper . Imagine having a your slave tell you , �yes master

I will serve you and commit myself to pleasing you , but before all that happens , let , � ! me go over here and handle some other business

It does not make sense at all does it ? Imagine acknowledging that a Creator exists . Without knowing any further information to describe your Creator�s attributes or His orders and commands to His creations , one would have to conclude that it was a duty to submit and worship his Creator . The Being with the power to make things that we ourselves cannot even comprehend deserves our complete attention . Anything that a creation wishes to do that is not in harmony with the desires of the Creator is done in vain . Why keep bumping one�s head going against the grain , when all one needs to do to be successful is submit to his Maker ? All creation must acknowledge that the Creator alone is fit to be worshipped and must disavow any distraction or �partner� . that could distract from worshipping the One True Supreme Being

I lived in mainland Tanzania and in the offshore Zanzibar Islands on and off for four months before I accepted Islam . I had reached the point where I realized that all of my efforts were futile if they were not centered around pleasing my Creator . This is humanity�s natural mode of existence . This is the way that all creation , animate or inanimate , functions . Mountains have behavioral characteristics determined by Allah

the Creator . Scientists may believe in geological evidence , but Muslims understand , that all of those sciences are just man�s attempt to comprehend what Allah creates . An astronomer can try to calculate the earth�s orbit around the sun , but no matter how close he comes to accuracy , all he can discover is what Allah already established . In that sense , there is no such thing as new knowledge . All knowledge is with Allah , and the only knowledge that we have is what Allah chooses to endow us with .

For example , let�s take someone many societies assume to be knowledgeable , like a physician . A physician studies anatomy , physiology , epidemiology , etc in order to gain a better understanding of the way that a human body operates . However , all of that knowledge and training can never change a matter once Allah has ordained it . When someone�s heart stops and doctors revive the person , they credit medical technology with a miracle , but if those same doctors , using that same technology failed to revive the heart , then they would recognize that technology and knowledge has limits . The limit is the extent to which Allah endows us with His own knowledge . That determines our ultimate aptitude .

When I accepted Islam , I did not have any epiphanies or land-shaking experiences . What I felt , was that after ٢٠ years of searching , Allah opened my heart to

accept the truth . It was always there . Imagine an archaeologist excavating the remains of the skeleton that he always believed existed . Whether or not he located the first bones , they were still there . He did not create them , he merely received the benefit of having his knowledge expanded by learning about the bones . The discovery , like accepting Islam , is the first step , and not the final answer . Assembling the individual bones into the proper order is similar to a Muslim putting his life together by building his faith . Finally , after assembling something that resembles a finished piece , the archaeologist can spend the rest of his life increasing his understanding of his new finding because he has more evidence than ever for study . The parallel works with a Muslim who devotes his life towards increasing his . knowledge in order to become the best servant of Allah that he can possibly be

Accepting Islam-that is to accept that Allah alone deserves worship , has no partners , is unlike any of His creations , and towers high above all things , and to believe that Muhammad was Allah�s messenger-that is the most important step , but it is also only the first . In no way should merely accepting the faith make one believe that he has become a believer or even a good Muslim for that matter . Improving oneself and , one�s devotion to his Creator is a lifelong endeavor

but only those who are smart enough to understand and mature enough to accept the truth will ever experience this felicity . Allah , the High and Exalted , guides whomever . He chooses . I am just thankful to be among that list

Holy Quran ١۶ : ٣

He created the heavens and the earth with the truth , highly exalted be He above . (what they associate (with Him

DENNIS WAYNE , BROTHER HASAN

: Here is my background

My name is Hasan . I was born Nov . ١٠ , ١٩٧٢ , and was named Dennis Wayne . My mother is full blooded Native American , although our heritage is from different tribes including the Lumbee , Cherokee and Tuscarora . My father went to prison before I was born and I have never met him and I know nothing of him other than his name . and the name of his mother

: Here is my story

When I was very young it was my desire to serve the Lord with righteous conduct and preaching . I loved righteousness and wanted to be like those righteous people who I had heard about in the Bible through the preachers at church and some movies on . television

One day , when I was about ۶ , ٧ or ٨ (I can�t remember the exact age . I was very young) , I was outside with two other of my childhood friends and I was preaching to them . I was imitating what I had seen my preachers do in church . I was

raised as a Southern Baptist although my mother was a Holiness and her own father a preacher from the same faith (Holiness) . (He would travel from place to place , and was what was referred to as a Holy Roller) .

Anyway , I was out there shouting , preaching the gospel of the Lord (astagfirlah) , yelling �Amen� , �Halleleujah� , �Praise the Lord� , �Praise Jesus� and so forth . I was out there saying how Jesus was God and the Son of God . I even got to the ashes to ashes and dust to dust part . But while I was out there doing all this , it all of a sudden grew dark and began a deep thundering sound , but it wasn�t raining . I became very scared , but the reason I was scared wasn�t because of the storm itself . It was because I realized I was lying on Allah (God)and I felt that this was either a warning or going to be a punishment . But alhumdullilah it was only a warning , Allahu Alim.

This incident didn�t make me become muslim but I feel it was a sign which I would not remember until later on in life . Then another incident occurred when I was in middle school , in the ٧th grade , and I was ١٣ yrs old . In my math class we had a man named Muhummad Uqdah who was our substitute teacher . I would always give him a

hard time , because to me he looked like a caveman . Although I teased this man , deep down inside I hated to do such things but I was showing off for the other classmates . In my Social Studies class(History) , we began studying the Middle East and its history and culture . It so happened that Mr . Uqdah was muslim so he was invited to our class to talk about Islam although he himself was not from the Middle East . He was African American . He began talking to us about Islam and showed us the salat . I knew it was the truth and wanted to become muslim . So after school when I went home , I picked up the phonebook and looked him up . I was getting ready to call him , infact I did dial his number , but I hung up because I started thinking about what my parents would think and other things . So I never called him and I didn�t become muslim , and I went on living my life . And I forgot this episode too . until later on

After finishing middle school , I went on to high school . I was pretty much considered a nerd . I was smart , didn�t really cause any trouble , hung out with other nerds , and my mother bought my clothes for me , which were mostly Hawaiian like shirts and cheap unbrandname pants . I was teased very much

because of my dress , because for the most part high school was nothing more than a fashion show . (And it is still like this today) People used to tease me and say I looked like the Karate Kid and I wore Teddy Toughskin pants (toughskin was the name of the pants and Teddy came from Teddy Ruxpin–the little Teddy Bear) . My family is poor and this was all we could afford and I would complain about such things back then , but now that I look back I am ashamed that I complained to my mother . All praise is .due to Allah for my mother . I can never repay her for all that she has done for me

Anyway , because of being teased and so forth , I eventually got a job so that I could buy my own clothes and so forth and have my own money , I would even save my lunch money so that I could put it towards my wad . So now since I start getting �cool� clothes , now I�m �cool� . And since I lived in a black neighborhood I got to be tough too . So I started drinking , hanging out , smoking weed , running my mouth to anyone and everyone , jacking folks , jumping people , and joining a gang , all so I could be cool . I had the ladies too , cause I was cute in my �cool� clothes . I was NWA

I even became mixed , because I sure wasn�t black , but I had a lot of people . wondering . My life had become a lie , and was not the righteous life I had wanted to live since my youth . I used to drink and listen to rap music . And there was a lot of political messages in the rap music I listened to . And since I was Native American , I .was angry with my situation in my own land

But one day I was watching Rap City and there was a group on there (I can�t remember their name) and they were Muslim so they were asked about Islam . Their response was simple , �Islam is the TRUTH . � I was in awe by this statement and wanted to know more about Islam . So I started going to the library to get my hands on things about Islam , but all I could get a hold of was things like; Our Saviour Has Arrived , and How To Eat To Live-this book is from Elijah Poole in which he states if you eat one meal a day you will live forever , guess he didn�t follow his own advice . I also came across some Sufi stuff talking about how virtuous it is to wrap your turban around your head about a thousand times . Needless to say I didn�t find the .guidance I was seeking

,Fortunately , one of my teachers at school

Fleming El Amin , was muslim and he lent me a copy of the Qur�an , not on school property of course . I kept it for some period of time without reading it . (I still had street affairs to attend to) . But one night I finally sat down and opened up the Qur�an , I can�t remember why , but when I started reading it , I started crying because I knew these words were meant for me and the rest of mankind for that matter . It indeed is the truth , as simple as that . Nothing has the right to be .worshipped except God alone

So shortly after that I was able to run into another Muslim from my area and was given directions to the mosque . After going there and talking with the brothers I finally took shahadah at the age of ١٧ . Alhumdullilah , Allah gave me back those things that I desired for myself from my youth and caused me to remember those signs from earlier on . I got back truth . I got back obedience to my Lord . I was able to leave those things which I was allowing to destroy my life . Most importantly , I got back my Lord with the correct understanding of how to worship and obey Him . And I pray for the same for those who read this and those who don�t read this . Ameen

:One more thing I would like to mention

Eventhough I was spending much of my time being a thug , I still hadn�t lost my intelligence . During the summer I was enrolled in the Kenan College Prepatory Program at Winston-Salem State University . My last year in this program was the same year I became Muslim . I would talk to my friends and tell them about my interest in Islam . I had two friends in particular who were adamant about me not becoming muslim and would spend their time trying to talk me out of it . One friend , Sekou , ended up becoming muslim while at AT State University , and the other friend , Orlando , ended up becoming muslim a few weeks ago at the same mosque I attend . WSSU is also where I met brother Husayn Abdur Rafi who gave me the directions to the masjid . It is a small miraculous world , alhumdullilah.

Salamu alaikum wa rahamtullah wabarakatu

Hasan

Holy Quran ١٧ : ٨١

And say : The truth has come and the falsehood has vanished; surely falsehood is a (vanishing (thing.

ALI MOLINA

In The Name of Allah , The Most Gracious , The Most Merciful

Para leer mi cuento en Espanol , toque aqui.

My name is Ali , I�m a ٢٩ year old Mexican American or as some would say a Chicano.

People have a wrong perception About Islam and Muslims , what little they know is usually from movies and television which is almost all the time false.

My life before was bad

I had no direction in life . I was wasting my life away by dropping out of school in the , ١١th grade . I would hang out in the streets with my friends �partying� getting high , drinking and selling marijuana , most of my friends were gang members , I myself was never in a gang . I knew most of them before they were criminals and drug dealers so it was not a problem . I slowly began to use harder drugs , I had dreams but they seemed to far away for me to make them reality . The more I became . depressed the more I turned to drugs as a temporary escape

One day A friend of mine told me that he knew where to get some good marijuana , I was eager to sample and buy some so I agreed to go check it out . We arrived and went inside this apartment there were a couple of people inside , we sat around and talked for a while and �sampled� the weed . My friend and I bought some and were getting ready to leave when my friend said one of the guys there invited us to his . apartment to give him a book

We left for this guy�s apartment when we got there , he gave my friend a book and asked him to read it , and said that it might help him out with his problems in life . On the way home I asked

. (my friend to show me the book that the guy gave him , it was the Qur�an (Koran

I had never in my life heard of The Holy Qur�an , I began to briefly read some pages while I was reading I knew that what I was reading was true , it was like a slap in the face , a wake up call . The Qur�an is so clear and easy to understand . I was really . impressed and wanted to know more about Islam and Muslims

The strangest thing is that I was not looking for a new Religion , I used to laugh at people that went to church , and some times said that there was no God . Although deep down I knew there was . I decided to go to the library a couple of days later and check out the Qur�an . I began to read it and study it , I learned About Prophet Muhammed (Peace be upon him) and the true story of Jesus son of Mary(Peace be upon him) . The Qur�an stressed the fact that God was one and had no partners or a son , this was most interesting to me since I never understood the concept of the trinity . The Qur�an describes the birth of Prophet Jesus (P . B . U . H .) and his mission . . There is also a Surah (Chapter) called Mary and tells her story as well

As a child I always went to

church , my mother was a Seventh day Adventist and took my sister and me every Saturday . I never was really religious and stopped going to church when I was about ۱۴ or ۱۵ . The rest of my family is Catholic , I always wondered why we were Seventh day Adventist and the rest of my family was Catholic . When we would go visit my family back in Mexico , we went to a Catholic church for weddings and Quencenira�s .((sweet ۱۶ celebration

Muhammed (peace be upon him) is the last Messenger of God sent to all mankind . The Qur�an tells the story�s of all the Prophets such as Adam , Abraham , Noah , Isaac , David , Moses , Jesus (Peace be upon them all) told in a clear and understandable manner . I did months of research on Islam I bought a Holy Qur�an at a bookstore and studied about World History and Islam�s contributions to .Medicine and Science

I learned that Spain was a Muslim country for about ۸۰۰ years and that when the Muslims were expelled from Spain by the Christian king and Queen (Ferdanand and Isabela) , the Christian Spaniards came to Mexico and forced the Aztecs and others to .become Catholic , history and my Islamic roots was all becoming clear to me

After months of study and research I could not deny the truth anymore I had put it off too long , but was still living the life I was before and

knew that if I became Muslim I had to give all that up . One day while reading the Qur�an , I began to cry and fell to my knees and thanked Allah for guiding me to the truth . I found out that there was a Mosque by my house so I went one Friday to see how Muslims prayed and conducted their service . I saw that people from all races and colors attended the Mosque . I saw that they took off their shoes when entering and sat on the carpeted floor . A man got up and began to call the Adthan (call for prayer) when I heard it my eyes filled up with tears it sounded so beautiful , it was all so strange at first but seemed so right at the same time . Islam is not just a Religion but a way of life .

After going a couple of Fridays I was ready to be a Muslim and say my Shahada ((declaration of faith .

I told the Khatib (person giving the lecture) that I wanted to be a Muslim , the following Friday in front of the community I said my Shahada first in Arabic then in English : I bear witness that there is no other God but Allah and I bear witness that Muhammed (P . B . U . H) is His Messenger .

When I finished a Brother shouted Takbir ! And all the community said Allah O Akbar ! (God is great ! (

a few times , then all the Brothers came and hugged me . I never received so many hugs in one day , I will never forget that day it was great . I have been Muslim since ١٩٩٧ , I�m at peace with myself and clear in Religion , being Muslim has really changed my life for the better thanks to Almighty God . I received my G . E . D . and . work in the computer field

I had the blessing of being able to perform Hajj (Pilgrimage) to the Holy city of Mecca , it was an experience of a lifetime , about three million people from every race and color in one place worshiping one God . It�s amazing ! Alhamdulilla in December of . ٢٠٠٢ I got married in Morocco to a very good Muslim woman

I think that Islam is the answer for the problems of the youth and society in general . I hope my story Insha�Allah (God willing) will attract more Latinos and people of all . races to the light of Islam

Holy Quran ٢٢ : ٦

This is because Allah is the Truth and because He gives life to the dead and because . He has power over all things

SUDDENLY ALL THE PIECES OF THIS PUZZLE WERE FITTING

I have always been aware of the existence of God . I have always felt that He was there . Sometimes that feeling was distant , and often times I ignored it . But I could never deny this knowledge . Because of this , throughout my

. life , I have been searching for the truth of His Plan

I have attended many churches . I listened , I prayed , I talked to people from all different faiths . But it seemed that there was always something that didn�t feel right , it felt confusing , like there was something missing . I�ve heard many people in the past say to me , �Well , I believe in God , but I don�t belong to any religion . They all seem wrong to me . � This was my feeling exactly , however , I didn�t want to just let it go at that and just accept it . I knew that if God exists then He wouldn�t just leave us with no direction , or even a warped version of the truth . There had to be a . plan , a �true religion . � I just had to find it

The various Christian churches is where I concentrated my search , simply because that is what I grew up with , and there seemed to be some truths in some of their teachings . However , there were so many different views , so many conflicting teachings on basic things like how to pray , who to pray to or through , who was going to be �saved� , and who wasn�t , and what a person had to do to get �saved . � It seemed so convoluted . I felt I was near giving up . I

had just come from yet another church whose views on God , and the purpose of our existence , left me so completely frustrated because I knew what they were teaching . wasn�t true

One day , I had wandered in the bookstore and I went over to the religious section . As I stood there gazing over the vast array of mostly Christian books , a thought occurred to me to see if they had anything on Islam . I knew virtually nothing about Islam , and when I picked up the first book it was solely out of curiosity . But I became excited with what I was reading . One of the first things that struck me was the statement �There is no god but Allah , � He has no associates , and all prayers and worship are directed to Him alone . This seemed so simple , so powerful , so direct , and made so much sense . So from there I started reading everything I could about . Islam

Everything I read made so much sense to me . It was as if suddenly all the pieces of this puzzle were fitting perfectly , and a clear picture was emerging . I was so excited my heart would race any time I read anything about Islam . Then , when I read the Qur�an , I felt like I was truly blessed to be able to read this . I knew that this had come directly from Allah through His

Messenger (SAW) . This was it , the truth . I felt like all along I had been a Muslim but I just didn�t know it until now . Now as I start my life as a Muslim , I have a sense of peace and security knowing that what I am learning is the pure truth and will take me closer to Allah . May Allah keep guiding me . Ameen.

Holy Quran ٢٥ : ٣٣

And they shall not bring to you any argument , but We have brought to you (one) with truth and best in significance.

SISTER SUSANNAH

Alhamdullilah I came from the darkness to the light as they say and at the age of ١٩ became a muslim . How I decided to be a muslim and the long road I travelled is often a subject I am asked about so inshallah I shall try to explain here and my hope is that my story will be one of inspiration to others.

I grew up the typical American girl , born and raised here in the US in a middle class family which was composed of my parents and one younger sister . My father was in the military so we moved around quite a bit but eventually we settled in Virginia and this was where I grew up primarily . My family had a Christian background and tradition , but my parents , both of whom worked full time did not have the time to take us often to church.

It was confined mostly to holidays or whenever we would visit our grandparents . I remember vividly attending sunday school as a small child , I remember being taught about Jesus and various other Christian virtues . However life being so fast as it is as I grew up into a teenager these principles and ideas began to seem foreign to me and I . didn�t acknowledge them or implement them in my daily life at all

My first introduction to Islam was in the ٩th grade when my world history class went to Washington dc and toured the Islamic center there . It was a gorgeous spring day , all of us were wearing shorts and T-shirts of course and I remember being stopped at the entrance at the mosque . The woman told us , �You cannot enter Allah�s house dressed like this� I remember we all laughed , especially the boys because a moment later the woman returned with long white skirts and scarves and insisted we wear them in the mosque . How strange I remember thinking to myself , what�s the big deal ? ? ? We were given a brief talk by someone who couldn�t speak English very well , needless to say it didn�t leave a great impression , but as a carefree . teenager , at the time religion was the furthest thing from my mind

Approximately a year and a half later a family from KSA moved in next door to my family . One night shortly after

they moved in I was walking my dog . When Umm Ali noticed I was walking towards the house next to hers , she immediately approached me . She insisted in a very kind way that I come and eat dinner with them . Now it was summer time , very hot and humid and before me stood this woman covered from head to toe , a complete stranger and suddenly she was insisting that I come and eat with her . At first I completely refused , but she stood her ground and eventually convinced me . When I asked her why was she so persistent she replied �Islam teaches us to be respectful and kind to our neighbors , you are my neighbor now and I must extend to you this . �courtesy

Well I was quite shocked by this but somehow it put me at ease I felt that there was a real sense of sincerity in this gentle woman . From that evening on Umm Ali I became the best of friends . It was a new experience for both of us , she had never had a close friend who wasn�t muslim and I had never had a muslim friend so we enjoyed our differences and respected them . She had a great sense of humor and we used to laugh a lot , and I adored her children and used to care for them as if they were my own nieces . From time to time we used to

discuss religion , but it was never in a forceful way . I used to ask her about her prayers , about her dress , during Ramadan she invited me every night for iftaar (though I wasn�t fasting) . Much of the dawah she made to me was through her actions , not her words . I began to respect and adore her so much as a person , woman , wife mother . It was very obvious to me that she was at peace with herself . At the time I was still quite young but I felt something starting to stir , it was more than a curiosity or an affection; I was starting even though I didn�t know it quite yet . to really take Islam seriously

Once I started studying in the university I began to really think seriously about my life , its direction and purpose . What was my main objective in life ? ? Why was I on this planet , to do what , to serve whom ? ? ? I reflected upon my Christian roots but they . seemed so alien to me at that point , so I started to search

I looked at Judaism , Buddhism , Hinduism , so many �isms� but I found a flaw in every one of them . Umm Ali was still with me at this time , she knew I was troubled and needed guidance but as was always her loving way she didn�t force me in . anything

She was there for me , to listen to my frustrations and fears , always kind and always caring . It was a time of great turmoil and then one night I had a dream . In the dream I was surrounded by darkness from all sides and in the distance I could see a great light and under that light was my dear friend and she was calling me but I could not go to her . When I woke up I was startled by this dream , what did it mean ? ? ? After many long nights I realized the meaning; the darkness was my life as I was living it and the light was Islam . I then decided to make shahadah , I went first to Umm Ali . and shortly after that to the masjid to make it official

My life since that time has taken a drastic change for the better . I no longer feel frustrated or confused , I know what the meaning of life is and my purpose here in this world . I used to waste my time always going out , going to the beach , long hours in the cinema or at concerts . Now I see how frivolous that all was . My main goal now is to serve Allah (SWT) whereas before my goal was to serve myself and my selfish needs . I am now ٢٧ years old a bit older and much wiser , I married nine months after

I became a muslim and I now have two lovely daughters . My life now is complete and since that great night I decided to be a muslim I have never looked back . The road was long and it was not always easy , but my faith trust in Allah (SWT) has always sustained me.

Susannah

Holy Quran ٢٧ : ٦٤

Or , Who originates the creation , then reproduces it and Who gives you sustenance from the heaven and the earth . Is there a god With Allah ? Say : Bring your proof if you are truthful.

BROTHER KHALIL

My name is Khalil Martin . I was born and raised in England and I have been a Muslim for ٢٣ years by the Grace and Mercy of Allah and this is my ٢٣rd Ramadan , Alhumdullilah , as I accepted Islam on the ٣rd of Ramadan ١٣٩٩ . I had been travelling and wandering vaguely in search of something for over ١٠ years . I used to tell people that I was searching for the Truth

but it always sounded pretentious . The fact was , I was searching for my Self and a place where I felt at home , for nothing satisfied me . My travels took me to Jerusalem by chance , not by design . But as soon as I arrived I realised that I had come to somewhere very special , unlike anywhere else I had been to . It seemed to have a presence and a light that was

truly inspiring . Up to that point I would have described myself as a non-practicing believer . In Jerusalem I started to pray in earnest going from place to place looking for the source of this presence . Eventually , in the afternoon , I went to the Mount of Olives . It was a name I was familiar with from reading the Gospels and it attracted me . On top of the Mount of Olives there is a sanctuary , run by some monks , where , it is said , Sayidna Isa used to go to pray and meditate and to teach his disciples . During the day-time it is busy with tourists , but one of the monks saw that I was sincere and offered to let me stay after sunset when they close .

In this cave I stayed and I prayed , and at that point I realised that all my life I had been attempting to guide myself , mainly at the service of my ego , but never had I turned to God , who created me , to ask Him the purpose and meaning of my life . So I asked for forgiveness and in a sense threw myself between His Arms and asked for His Help and Guidance . After about an hour I left feeling at peace and knowing that my life had changed forever . Immediately , I was accosted by a lady who insisted that I should meet her Sheikh . I was in

a very surrendered state , I was unable to argue . She instructed a local boy to take me to the house of the Sheikh (actually I had no idea what she told the boy because it was all in Arabic) so I entrusted myself into the care of this young boy of maybe ٧ or ٨ . We went down a steep hill on the other side of the Mount of Olives into the darkness , not knowing where I was going or why I was going there . After a while we turned off the main road down an alley and some steps and he delivered me in front of this large building , pointed to it , and disappeared . I had no idea what I was supposed to do . But the daughter of the house came out to wash the steps , saw me standing there , . and told me to enter

She showed me to an empty sitting room . Within moments the Sheikh entered . He said , in English �Yes Beloved what can I do for you ? � I felt nervous and embarrassed , but asked him about the Truth . He told me that if I wanted to find the Truth that I would need a Guide who knew the way to the Truth . When I asked him how to find the Guide he said �Seek and you will find , knock and the door will be opened� . This touched me because although

he was a Muslim , he was speaking the language of Jesus , and words that I could respond and relate to , because I had myself used those words on occasion . At that time I was also very concerned that the world was heading towards Armageddon and had read some books that dealt with the signs concerning this in the Bible and other texts . So I asked what the Qu�ran had to say . As soon as I asked the question my heart knew the answer---If you make your peace with God then you have nothing to .fear

To be honest though , generally , I felt quite awkward , a scruffy , ignorant , hippy .taking the time of this Sheikh . So as soon as it was polite I took my leave to go

As I was leaving it came so strongly to my heart that I had begged God for guidance , I had knocked at the door , and when He opened a door for me I wanted to run away . At that moment I knew that this was the answer to my prayers . Wanting to be sure that I was not allowing myself to be swept along by events I returned to Jerusalem . three days later I returned to the house of the Sheikh to ask to be his student , and so I embraced Islam a few days after my ٢٨th birthday . Praise be to Allah , Who guides to His Light

. whom He Wills , and without whose Help and Mercy we would be in utter darkness

years later he married me to my wife , Fatima , who originates from Austria and ٧ studied Arabic linguistics at Vienna University . Allah has blessed us with three children . I was a drop-out and never qualified in anything , but Allah has been generous and . gracious to me . I inherited a menswear shop from my father that I now run

The Sheikh is Muhammed al-Jamal ar-Rifai , formerly Deputy Mufti for Al Aqsa and the West Bank and Sheikh of the Shadhdhuliyyah Tariq . He is now head of the Higher Sufi Council of Jerusalem and his office is on the raised daias within the Haram , ٥٠ metres from the Dome of the Rock . He is a Sheikh of the Shariah (Law) and of the Haqiqa (Truth) , the inside and the outside . In ٢٢ years I have never met anyone who I . have found to be greater in knowledge

Holy Quran ٢٩ : ٤٤

Allah created the heavens and the earth with truth; most surely there is a sign in this . for the believers

ANISAH GEORGIA LILIOU

part ١

I welcomed Islam into my life at , what people think , a very young age . And yet , bringing back to my memory the years before my conversion , is still a chilling experience for me . In principle , my conversion story may seem similar to many other stories . But what still amazes

me is the relation between the events; a proof to the fact that God�s Will prevails , . no matter the circumstances

I was born and brought up in Athens . My parents , like ٩٨٪ of the people in Greece , are Orthodox Christians . During the first years of my life I cannot remember them being particularly religious . They led a normal family life , which included the occasional visit to the church . The people who reminded us of our responsibility towards our religion were almost always my grandmothers and grandfathers . My mother�s parents were both children of priests and had great knowledge in Christian traditions . In their bedroom , they had converted part of their wardrobe into a church , shelves stocked with images of Jesus , Virgin Mary and various saints . Every night , my grandfather would stand in front of that shelf for a couple of hours , reading with . humility the holy book; a picture I will never forget

As I almost always spent my holidays with them , they introduced me to the routine of reading every night little poems to Virgin Mary . That , however , did not prevent me from having my own spiritual experiences . Up until the age of ten I used to see in my dream the events of the following day , which I thought was something normal . I never did my homework , unless I saw in my dream that my teacher would examine me

So I would do it in the school bus , on the way to school . Sometimes I would see . dreams relating to other people�s worries , worries I knew little about . My elder sister probably realises this better than me . Sometimes in the morning I would say to her �I had the weirdest dream� , I would narrate it to her and then forget all about it . She would not forget though , and years later she confessed to me that my dreams . had affected her life

When I was ١٠ or ١١ , nothing seemed to go well . We had family problems , school was very hard for me , I had no friends . One night I slowly slid out of my bed and decided to pray for help . I think I spent about ١٠ minutes just standing there; I was trying to decide who to pray to . �Should I pray to Jesus or Virgin Mary ? Saint George or Saint Helen ? Or that saint , �the protector of children� ? But what�s her name ? � In the end , I did not pray to anyone that night . My reason was that I did not want to offend anyone by not praying to them . But deep down , I had realized that there was . something wrong about this religion

My parents invested a lot of money in my education , and chose responsible schools that honoured the beliefs of the Christian

faith . However , the principle of respecting the faith of the Greeks was more inspired to me in the History class , rather than the Theology class . We had remained Greeks and Christians after a devastating ۴۰۰-year Turkish occupation , and we clearly owed that to the religious leaders of that time . So , although the Christian faith did not appeal to me , I felt it was my responsibility to show some gratitude by going to the church once in a while . But I never believed that , just by standing there in front of an elderly man dressed in gold who was reciting for two hours was bringing me any .closer to salvation

The huge gap between the message of the scriptures and their application on people�s lives was something that always made me very skeptical . For most of the times , I did agree with the teachings of the biblical stories . But the people around me did not practice what they learnt from the scriptures . Instead , they had invented their own traditional rituals with a lot of symbolic elements , to the extent that everything in their faith remained just that : a symbolism , and not an everyday .practice outside the church

I believed that all the Prophets mentioned in the Bible were indeed the Prophets of God , sent to deliver a divine message . However , this message is not clear in the Bible , and sometimes , it is dangerously

contradicting . For example , the Old Testament lists a large number of commandments which Prophet Moses conveyed to his people . The Prophet suffered a lot to deliver these laws and to convince people to follow them . But nowadays we are told that we do not have to follow these laws , as our love for Jesus would be sufficient for our salvation . But wouldn�t it be unreasonable of God to make His dear Messenger go through all this , so that we discard His message today ? One has to only see the effect of the prohibited things in the modern world . People are born with perfect lungs , yet they destroy them by smoking . Families fall apart , wives get abused , children become orphans because of some pints of alcohol . And we still think . there is no necessity to exclude these from our lives

Imagine you are a teenager and your parents had to go away for some time . For your own good , they appointed your uncle to keep an eye on you . Your father said to your uncle : �Please , make sure he comes home early , does his homework , does not mix with bad companies , and does not do anything that is wrong� . They then go away . But your uncle does not prove as reliable as your parents thought . Instead , he tells you to do whatever you like . Because you consider your uncle

a credible source , you take advantage of the liberties you are given . So , you are getting yourself into real trouble and end up being in a really bad state . Now , although your parents are far away , they can in fact see everything that you do because , if you like , they have installed CCTV cameras all around the house . How would you react if years later you found out they knew you were in this state , yet did not do anything to help you or protect you ? Because , being a parent is not just someone that brings you into this world , it is also someone with the responsibility to nurture you and keep you away from evil things . Would you agree that , in that case ? your parents did not fulfill their responsibility as parents

The relationship between God and man is similar to the one between parent and child . Through the prophets He gradually introduced us to a number of laws so that we can find peace in this life and get the reward of another life . Our first lesson was the story of Adam and Eve , where we learn that there is an abundance of good things but also a portion of bad things , of which we should be aware and protect ourselves from . The Holy Bible contains the truth , but some parts of it are distorted , either deliberately or by genuine mistake

And by observing people , I found that they preferred the distorted parts and hence , . . were led astray

My perception of God was always a God who is Perfect , a God who fulfills His responsibility towards His creation , just as a good parent fulfills his responsibility towards his child . So , I found it irresponsible of God that He would conclude His revelation to us with a book which has so much misguidance in it . How could He stand seeing us falling into sin , disputing with one another on whether He is one or three , without putting the record straight ? But on the other hand , I really believed that Christianity was the closest to the truth . I never attempted to study Buddhism , Hinduism or the similar faiths; I believed in Jesus and the rest of the Prophets , and I would be denying them by doing so . Islam had fallen under the same category , because I did not know at the time that Muslims accept all prophets , from Adam to Jesus , and finally Muhammad . In fear of loosing my faith that there is even a God , I remember myself saying , �God , show me your true guidance and I will follow it with my heart and soul� . I honestly did not think that God was listening at that moment , but the events of the years to follow proved that God was listening very carefully

. indeed

I decided to study graphic design when I was ١٣ , after reading an article about it . Four years later my dream almost reached a dead-end; to be admitted to the university I had to pass tests on maths , physics and chemistry , the subjects I was the worst at . Knowing that I was bound to fail if I followed that route , I started looking anxiously for alternatives . Somebody suggested studying in UK , which I mentioned to my parents . To my surprise , my parents were willing to make the sacrifice and let me go . Although my preparation included ٧٠ hours of studying per week , I realised I was going only when I got to the airport to catch my flight . Most students take a parent with them for the first-day difficulties . I did not do that , because I wanted to . avoid becoming too sentimental about the whole experience

Adjustment did not prove difficult for me , and I probably have my mother to thank for that . She always insisted that I learn foreign languages and at the age of nine I had my first penpal . I grew to correspond with people from all around the world , different cultures , different faiths � a very exciting experience . During my first months in the UK my circle consisted predominately by Greek people . But soon I felt unhappy and wanted to take full advantage of the potential by meeting

non-Greek people . Naturally , I left that circle and started interacting with other , to . my view , much more interesting people

Amongst these people was a Muslim student that I had met from the first day there . We used to run into each other all the time; he was always polite and very tactful . Although we were coming from very different backgrounds , we were in the same wavelength and we used to agree in everything apart from religion � I thought . He knew I was very negative about Islam but one day he decided to address the issue of religion in a very delicate manner . He asked me to explain to him the theory of the . Trinity and how Jesus can be the son of God

Under other circumstances I would not make much effort to answer , but that day I really tried my best . I told him everything I had learnt in school and I analysed all the different methodologies that reach the conclusion that there is a Trinity . However , he always managed to answer back with a better argument , because as I discovered later , he knew more about Christianity than me . In a moment of absolute frustration , I uttered these honest words : �If you want to know about the Trinity , you better ask someone who really believes in it . Because I do not believe that Jesus is the son of God , my instinct tells

me that he was just a Prophet� . On that he replied , �This is what we believe� . . That second my journey in discovering Islam had begun

I did not allow my friend to preach me about Islam . My whole life I was being preached at and I did not like it – this time I was after constructive dialogue . He was superb in debating and great help in explaining things; two qualities I appreciated much more than preaching . This way I did not feel that I was being led at something or being brainwashed; I followed my own pace . I started studying the basics of Islam , which I compared with Christianity . I never knew there were so many similarities . between these two religions

part ٢

Just as Christianity is the next step from Judaism , only that the Jewish people do not accept Jesus , in the same way Islam is the next step from Christianity , only that the Christians do not accept Muhammad . The main principle of Islam is that there is only one God and Muhammad is His Messenger . I agreed many times with this principle but I kept on studying , sincerely hoping that Muhammad would have said or taught something I did not approve of . But whenever I found such points , after studying them in detail , I discovered that there was always a perfectly reasonable explanation . behind them

Having agreed with the basics , I moved on studying

more complicated issues . If I were to accept this faith I wanted to eliminate the chance of regretting it by learning as much as possible about it . As I kept on reading , not only I found in words what I already felt in my heart , but something even more complete in a miraculous way . The authenticity of the message , the wisdom in the divine commandments , the scientific evidence , all added up into a system that could have never been invented by man . This �system� not only solved the problems that I had identified in the Holy Bible , but it unveiled a whole new perspective in leading a life where religion is actually a way of life and not just a part of the jigsaw . Furthermore , if one were to study the commandments in the Bible and then objectively observe the Christians and the Muslims , he would find that the Muslims follow it more to the word , and hence the Muslims are better �Christians� than the .Christians

My conversion to Islam happened in three stages . In the first stage I could see that Islam is a better religion than Christianity , but was scared to admit it . In the second stage I managed to fight my prejudice towards Islam and be honest with myself by saying , �Yes , Islam is definitely better� . But then I did not want to imitate the hypocrites , who say they believe in

one thing , yet they do not act upon it or do the opposite . If I really believed that I am a sincere person who does not set double-standards , that was the time to prove it . So , I decided to accept and act upon the truth to which I was guided , and that was . the final stage of my conversion

It took me some time to get used to the idea that I was a Muslim now , but the knowledge I was acquainted with over the years gave me great confidence . Being in peace with my consciousness gave me the strength to deal with any problems that were to come . Unfortunately though , I was so excited over discovering Islam that I thought all Muslims appreciated this gift and honoured it by acting upon it to the letter . Many converts say that if they were to judge Islam by the people and not by the Book , they would have never become Muslims . Indeed , I met many Muslims who looked very religious , yet gave to Islam a bad name by following their cultural tendencies or their individual desires . Some instead of giving support to new Muslims , try to push them towards their own deviated groups that take people outside the fold of Islam . And some even find it difficult to accept that a convert may know more than a born Muslim , and hold grudges when they see that their

advice is not followed . But God is all-praiseworthy , who made it a test and a learning experience for me , out of which I came out stronger . For now I can distinguish the good and sincere Muslims , who have good intention in their hearts and many good . deeds in their account with the Lord

I did not make any formal announcement to my family about my conversion; I always considered religion to be a very private thing and had grown to detest the fact that many people in Greece use religion as a social security system . All the people who accept Islam and act upon it notice a good change in their personality . The same happened to me , but unfortunately went unnoticed in my family , because I was always known as a well-mannered and disciplined child . Yet I had changed considerably; I was more patient with people , I was able to resolve arguments in a grown-up manner , I was less stressed and more positive about life . I had gone through problems , I had asked God�s help , even through routes that I found impossible , and He did it for me , He protected me and guided me . And when God is . your friend and your helper , you should not fear anything

My family did not notice all that . But they noticed changes in my diet , my dressing code and my social circle . I did not try

to hide the fact I was a Muslim , but I did not make it obvious either . Besides , I was gradually introducing myself into practicing Islam , and I thought that gradual progress is something that works well with everyone . Many children forget that parents are the people who have seen you growing and know you best; and I was not such a child . I could soon sense that my parents knew � my father knew and accepted it , my mother knew and tried to deny it by not thinking about the possibility of it . A convert has to be very sensitive on this issue . Some parents get shocked when their child decides to abandon a major part of the family�s identity . They start blaming themselves , thinking that they were not good parents , thus the child is punishing them by denying the principles that they cultivated in him/her . This is not the case . As other converts� parents , my parents also brought me up very well , giving me a Christian education because they sincerely believed that it was the best for me . But in school you also learn to build up arguments by weighing the pros and the cons , finally coming to a judgment of whether something is beneficial or not . This is the key to survival in life; if we did this more often , we would save ourselves from a lot of trouble . And this is

exactly what I have done . I have put Christianity on one side of the scale , and Islam
. on the other � and Islam , to my surprise , is a clear winner

It is not a crucial issue for me whether or not my family accepts the fact that I am a Muslim , because I will always find ways to practice my religion and therefore have peace within myself . If they do not accept it now , they will accept it as years go past , when my ongoing commitment to Islam will be getting more and more obvious . The more I read and learn , the surer I become that I made the right decision � a solid proof that this is not a phase . However , holding on to the reality that I am still the same person , is very essential to me . Unfortunately , a person may be known as sensible and responsible throughout the years , yet when s/he decides to follow a route opposite the establishment , he gets stripped off these qualities . It is an example of the double standards that get applied as a common practice nowadays , but it is only a self-defense mechanism people use to create the pretense that an issue is not there , therefore they do not have to deal with it . I had people around me who knew me very well , had acknowledged the maturity in me and had declared their

full trust in me . However , when the news reached them , I became this far-too-young person to take such mature decisions , who had been brainwashed and had no independent will . Hence , a conversion like this is also a real test for relationships , . which can have shockingly disappointing outcomes that one ought to be prepared for

Here it might be interesting to add that after having studied Islam and Christianity for years , I have come up with my own terminology on what makes someone a Muslim or a Christian . A Muslim is someone who believes and accepts the teachings of the Holy Qur�an wholeheartedly; therefore I am confident that I am a Muslim because I do not reject any part of the Qur�an . Similarly , a Christian is someone who accepts the Holy Bible wholeheartedly , but I rarely meet people like that . I personally do not perceive my family as Christian anymore , because each one of them follows his/her own version of Christianity , whether they realise it or not . My mother says that she accepts and believes the Bible , but her whole life has denied studying it , because �belief should be free of investigation� . Therefore , in my view , she does not really know what she believes in . My father also says he accepts the Bible , but uses his intellect to reject parts of it that his own logic does not agree with . My sister�s

faith is the most obvious example of all , as she totally rejects the Old Testament because of its content , believes in Trinity , yet when in hardship she does not turn to . �God/Jesus/Holy Spirit , but to Virgin Mary . So the �Trinity� becomes �Tetranity

I think there are two main reasons for filtering and adjusting a religion to our own liking; (a) we have misunderstood the principle of religion and therefore we exploit it to our own advantage , or (b) we realise the importance of religion so well that we are prepared to scrutinize it and filter it using the intellect that God has gifted us with . But in this case , when changing it , we indirectly admit that this religion is not perfect . The question is : will we be honest with ourselves and ask for guidance , or will we continue to live in uncertainty because we fear change ? Would God really create this perfect world for us to live in , but according to an imperfect system ? My hope is that one day my family will raise these questions , but for the time being , they regard themselves as Christians and I ought to respect that . When I go back home , I practice what we are told in the Qur�an : �Unto you your religion , and unto me my religion� , (١٠٩ : ۶) . Therefore , I put no burden on them , but in return I expect

them to put no burden on me , in order to have an ongoing healthy relationship . I do not think that religion is the cause for the evil wars that happen throughout history , . but it is the people�s unwillingness to be patient and tolerant with each other

Before I got to know about Islam , I had created my own framework of what I perceived the perfect religion to be like . I judged everything I learnt and saw according to that; if something did not fit to my own framework , I would reject it , otherwise , I would accept it . Many times I struggled to protect my own framework against the external influences , in order to keep it in the same condition as when I was little � simple and pure . In hindsight I realise that I was protecting the instinct that is granted to every human being , the belief in One God and the will to worship Him only . Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said , �Every child is born with a true faith of Islam (i . e . to worship none but Allah Alone , the One and only God) but his parents convert him to Judaism , Christianity or Paganism . � I believe that the people who convert to Islam are the people who guard this instinct with honesty and know that there is a perfect religion somewhere out there , although they have not heard about it yet

So God rewards them for their honesty and grants them what they have been hoping . for . And the people who are lost are those who deny to admit God�s Perfection , . thus do not expect anything perfect from Him

And when it is said to them : �Come to what Allah has revealed and unto the Messenger Muhammad� , they say : �Enough for us is that which we found our fathers following� , even though their fathers had no knowledge whatsoever , and ? no guidance

Holy Qur�an , ۵ : ۱۰۴

Holy Quran ۲ : ۱۴۷

. The truth is from your Lord , therefore you should not be of the doubters

MY CONVERSION UNTO HIM AARON HAROON SELLARS

part ۱

Why did I accept Islam ? This is a question that I have been asked many times by others , and a question that I have asked myself many times . Firstly , it was the Will of God because it is He that changes hearts and guides someone to a way that is straight ! Secondly , because I was looking for the truth , the real truth and nothing but the truth ! Thirdly , because there were doctrinal elements in my previous religion of Christianity that at first hearing seemed acceptable but when reflected , analyzed , and prayed upon , proved to be not only unacceptable but also contradictory , inconsistent , and even blasphemous ! But why ISLAM ? Why , when I was looking for the real and whole truth did God guide me to Islam

and not to one of many religions available to man or just another branch of Christianity ? The answer to this important question was to unfold as I took my first .steps towards my spiritual quest

The basic seed of God-consciousness was implanted in me from birth , but my soul was moulded to the teachings of the Christian church . My religious upbringing was never something that was forced , nor was it just occasional or just habitual . It seemed to be a natural and essential part of the fibre of my family . One of my fondest childhood memories till this day is of my mother reading me Bible stories every Sunday . But when I reached my teens and especially when I entered college , that .spiritual nurturing became tainted more and more

The college scene is where most people of religious background either completely abandon that upbringing or like in my case , just put it on pause . It�s really hard not to when you are surrounded by co-ed dorms , open promiscuity , easy access to alcohol , ۲۴ hour parties , and curfew-free nights . There weren�t any churches around campus that I was interested in so my Sundays began to feel like any other day of the week . While in college I experienced many things and learned many lessons of life but one particular experience had brought me right to the edge of cliff ,of death ! The situation was so unexpected so shocking

so overwhelming , that I honestly felt that the only solution was suicide . It took someone whom I had known for just a little while , breaking down and crying when he realized what I was about to do , for me to just pause and think . I thought that something was truly wrong if this guy had a higher value for my life than I did . As I stood there , I never felt so empty in my life . There was the big void where my soul was supposed to be and I felt like Moses (pbuh) and his followers being chased by the enemy from all sides only to be confronted by the impassable Red Sea ! I realized that it was time to make the call they had made . The call of faith-the call of God !

I decided to return to the church of my youth , a Baptist church in Washington D . C . I heard that there was a new pastor preaching there that was thorough and I decided to try him out . Praise God , the preacher was young , dynamic , and effective . He really made the Bible come to life in his sermons and made living for God seem real and worthwhile . Coming from the position of a person who was ready to kill himself , these messages were beginning to fill my emptiness and make me want to live and give life another chance . I remember

the nervous excitement of accepting the call to new membership at church and the newness and freshness of being dipped into the water at my baptismal ceremony . I felt reborn ! Clean ! With the lips I accepted Jesus (pbuh) as my �lord and saviour� but deep down in my heart , I was just reaccepting the reality of God in my life ! As I went deeper in my walk of faith the problem that had almost caused me to slay myself vanished like an illusion ! Like it was only there to make me turn to my Creator ! This gave me a new drive , motivation , and a sense of purpose . I became very active to the extent of encouraging a few of my friends to join the church . I would watch and listen to the pastor in awe , day dreaming of becoming one myself . I honestly felt that the best thing to do for a living would be to help people turn to God . Something that had proven to be so successful in my life . But at the same time I was always very open-minded , especially when it came to spiritual truth , I think this is what made me . a vessel to receive the full truth , in Islam

After a while I began a private hobby of studying world religions . The first book I read , �The Religion of Man� , was actually one that I had borrowed from

a friend . The first chapter I read was the chapter on Islam and it was a tremendous surprise ! It began with a little Arabian history and a biography of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) followed by an explanation of the basic tenants and doctrines of Islam . I could not believe the similarity and relationship that it had with Christianity . It wasn�t some foreign religion made up by some foreign man who worshipped some foreign God . It was the true Abrahamaic (pbuh) religion , revealed through a man whose very lineage traced back to Abraham�s (pbuh) first son Ishmael (pbuh) who worshipped the same one true God . This further fed my curiosity and interest in Islam . I had decided to keep myself open so I also read the history and doctrines of Buddhism , Hinduism , Judaism , Native American spirituality , and other smaller religious sects , cults , and movements . Buddhism seemed to renounce the world too much yet was not clear on the afterlife . In Hinduism the worship seemed too loose and unfocused with it�s great deity residing in many reforms , Judaism seemed basically true but had had too much of a racial bias , and Native American to vary by the tribe . Islam was the only one whose theology and practices seemed truly universal . The information that I had gathered so far was not enough to make me want to change my religion but that was soon to change when I

! came into contact with the Qur�an

I was working at a music store where a young woman used to come to the store with whom I used to have general conversations and on one occasion happened to bring up the topic of Islam . I then found that she was a Muslim and she told me that I could get more information on Islam at a little session that her father helped teach with some other Muslim . I was both nervous and excited at my first visit but it was my first time being around real Muslims ! I was initially impressed by the racial variety , the simple environment , and the warm humbleness of the attendants . They answered a few basic questions of mine but I was there mostly to listen . When it was prayer time , I quietly watched from a distance with a smile . Seeing all the men , women , and children bow in unison and put their faces flat against the ground in prayer seemed a little strange and funny , yet so humble , so unified , and so natural . It seemed like this was the ultimate way that we as God�s creations were supposed to pray . I recalled in my mind accounts in Bible of other prophets like Abraham , Moses , and Jesus (pbuh) , throwing themselves to the ground in humility and prayer to God yet this is not the way we prayed in church as �Christians� , but

the Muslims did ! Jesus (pbuh) told us to greet each other by saying �Peace be with you� , yet we Christians didn�t do this . It was the Muslims who greeted each other saying �As-Salaamu Alaikum� which means �Peace be with you� . In Christianity only �orthodox� nuns covered their heads and bodies , but this was a standard practice of modesty , chastity and humbleness for millions of practicing Muslim women who were interactive members of the society . It wasn�t something reserved for the �orthodox� . I left that little session engulfed in a maze of thoughts .

part ٢

When I saw my Muslim friend at the music store again I thanked her and told her how wonderful it was and that I was sure to return . She then asked me if I had a Qur�an yet . I said �No� . I thought that the Qur�an was only in a foreign language and that I couldn�t read it but she said that she would give me an English translation from the original Arabic . I gladly accepted the offer and was even more excited when I received it ! �WOW ! My first real Qur�an� . I couldn�t wait to start reading it . The first thing I did was to look up Jesus(pbuh) in the index and look up every verse it listed under his name . This was the prophet that I was raised on and was dear to me so I had to know what God had revealed

in this book about him . If it degraded , ridiculed , or rejected him in any way I was going to close the book and leave Islam alone . I agreed when I read that God was not three in one but one in an exclusive and unique sense . I agreed even when I read that Jesus (pbuh) was born of a virgin but was not God�s �Son� . When I was studying idioms in ancient Hebrew and other Semitic languages �Son� meant nearness and was used in the old testament in reference to other people and prophets , the term �Son of God� meant one who was near and closely attached to God , as the term �Son of man� meant one near and close to man . Incidentally , the use of the term �Son of man� outnumbers the use of the term �Son of God� in reference to Jesus (pbuh) . Even though , in the Qur�an Jesus (pbuh) was always referred to as the �Son of Mary� . God revealed that the birth of Jesus (pbuh) was like that of Adam (pbuh)-He merely said �BE� and �He was� , and Adam had neither a physical father or mother and no one worshipped him as the �Only Begotten Son of God� ! I agreed when I read that Jesus(pbuh) was not God in human form but a human prophet that was created by God , sent by God and who himself needed , depended on , feared , and prayed

to God . I agreed when I read that the Jews had no victory in killing him and that God raised him to Himself . But when I read that they also did not crucify him I was in shock ! The impact of the ١٥٧th verse in the ۴th chapter of the Qur�an was to dramatically change my life from that point on !

I�m not one to just accept something right away or to just reject something right away . I investigate . In the day I would reflect on that one verse , and at night I would pray over it . I would beg God in tears to show me in a dream what actually happened in detail to Jesus (pbuh) if he was not crucified . What was real ? What was false ? I wanted to know badly . I was looking hard . Examining , searching , debating . The soul was the most important thing in the world to me and mine was on a quest . I always wanted to know my Creator and serve my Creator but I wanted to make sure that I knew Him the right way and I wasn�t going to let up until I found what I felt was the right path .

When I finally stopped waiting for that big dream and asked myself �Well , what does this word crucifixion mean for the Christian ? � . For the Christian this word meant salvation ! Salvation meaning the deliverance from the

penalty of sin which was spiritual death in Hell . It also meant success in this life and the next . To me this is the vital thing that religion must give man or else it is useless . To say that if Jesus (pbuh) was not crucified , there�s no way that God Almighty could forgive His beloved mankind did not sound right . Jesus(pbuh) was very dear to my heart and to think that the Loving , Forgiving God sent him on earth only to be murdered for an innumerable mass of sins that he himself never committed did not seem fair or even sensible . If God could create the whole universe by saying �Be� and �IT WAS� then why couldn�t He do the same for the tiny littler sinner who is admitting his guilt and asking Him for forgiveness ? Why couldn�t He say to the person �Be forgiven� and he or she is forgiven ? Why was the murder and blood of an innocent man a necessity for this forgiveness ? I said to myself , �If this book can map out a plan of salvation that has nothing to do with murder or blood then I will . �submit to God and His plan

This made me deeply review my Bible and try to find what was essential necessity for salvation . The Jews and the Muslims never put anything in between them and their prayer to God so why did the Christians ? There was nothing in between Adam

and God , or Abraham and God , or Moses and God , or David and God , or Jesus and God ! God had taught through the Bible that a person was individually responsible for his sins and that no one else could pay for or be penalized for them . Jesus(pbuh) was preaching repentance and telling people that their sins were forgiven before this supposed crucifixion ! So why all of a sudden was the blood of one martyr necessary for humanity to be forgiven ? This issue of sacrifice , blood , and forgiveness seemed .to be summed up in just a few verses in the Holy Qur�an

Concerning sacrifice chapter ۲۲ : ۳۷ , had the answer , �It is not their flesh nor their blood that reaches God , it is your piety that reached Him . He has made them (animals) subject to you , that you may glorify God for His guidance to you� . Concerning sin and forgiveness God revealed in chapter ۱۲ : ۸۷ , �No one despairs of God�s mercy except those who have no faith� . Also , in chapter ۳۹ : ۵۳ �do not despair of God�s mercy for God forgives all sins . He is indeed OFTEN Forgiving and Most Merciful� . I found exacting parallels in the Bible in Psalms ۳۰ : ۵ , ۳۲ : ۵ , ۶۲ : ۱-۲ , ۱st Samuel ۱۵ : ۲۲-۲۳ , Luke ۱۵ : ۷-۱۰ , Ezekiel ۱۸ : ۲۰-۳۵ , Isaiah ۱۲ :

and Luke ٧ : ٤٧-٥٠ , ١٠ : ٢٥ , ١٨ : ٢٤ , and many others if you just look them up and , ٢-٣ reflect . When I read in the Qur�an in chapter ١٠ : ٥٧ , �O mankind ! There has come to you a direction from you Lord and a healing for the diseases in your hearts - and for those who believe , A Guidance and a Mercy ! � I said to myself �This is it . This IS THE WORD OF GOD !! �

My Muslim Friend from the music store had shown me a mosque that to my surprise was ١٠ minutes away from my home ! On my second visit to the mosque , I declared my faith in ١٩٩٤ and stated that �There is no God worthy to be worshipped except the ONE , Most High God or Allah . That Muhammad (pbuh) is His Last Messenger to mankind . That the Qur�an is the last revealed and written will and testament of Allah to and for mankind to follow until the Day of Judgment� . I had finally come home and found peace ! As I gradually built my faith and practice in ISLAM , I found that Islam was not the religion of killers and terrorists ! It is the true religion of humankind , nature and all creatures seen and unseen . Islam is by name the religion of those who seek peace and success through obedience and submission to the

will of Allah ! I had found the path to success , the path to true salvation ! Allah in the revelation of the Qur�an has refocused all forms of worship , prayer , fear and thanx to Him and Him alone ! You are High , Lord of all creations , and has reminded mankind and all creations of their true place-dependent and subservient to Allah and Allah alone !

Holy Quran ٢ : ١٤٩

And from whatsoever place you come forth , turn your face towards the Sacred Mosque; and surely it is the very truth from your Lord , and Allah is not at all heedless of what you do .

CHAD M . SNYDER

When I was about ١٠ , my mother and stepfather decided to become Christians . Of course , as parents do , they wish to instil the same social , political , and religious values on their children . I became a rather active member . My parents went every Sunday and became board members on various committees and so forth . I spent time in the youth group . As I further studied Christianity , I began to notice so many contradictions and various things that I began to question my faith about two years later when I was about ١٢ . I had always been sceptical and to the point of cynicism . I believe the final cut that was to seal my break with Christianity involved my father . As my parents were divorced I saw my father usually every

weekend . We had a large youth group event coming up and I would have loved to have my father join me . When my mother found out she immediately didn�t allow me to go and made a rather heated phone call to my father . Her main reason was that it was �her� church and if he wanted to go to church he had to find �his� own church . �My� church and �your� church ? I believed that completely went against all that I was taught . When I asked about this the explanation only got worse . My mother stated that I had to understand that no matter how much my father might have found God , he would never go to heaven and he was not allowed in �her� church . This had me extremely upset . I thought it would be a good thing if my father found God and attended church . The pastor himself took me aside and confirmed what my mother had said . Since my dad was a �really bad sinner� he would never get to heaven . I asked what a �really bad sinner� was and got a run around . From that point on I realized that God may be forgiving but none of his followers had to be . That all that a saved Christian had to do was ask forgiveness and no matter what they did they would go to heaven , no questions asked . I knew that what I considered

to be Christianity was no longer for me . I slowly started my break and finally at the age of ١٤ completely removed myself from all of it . I knew there was a god and had faith that there was one , but I didn�t know who . I started reading about religion a few years later . I started reading about Islam in about ١٩٩٩ . I had always had sympathy for the Muslims in other countries . I saw how the US always called them �militants , murderers , terrorists� , and the like . I had gone to public school and new several Muslims and knew that they weren�t like that . I figured that they picked the �bad apples� to represent the whole group . The more I read about Islam the more it appealed to me . In January of ٢٠٠٣ , I started to have a rough time . I was laid off and my employment mainly supported myself , wife and almost two year old and my wife was pregnant with our second child , my car broke down and was going to cost about two thousand to fix . It really looked like everything came crashing down . Like many people do who are in that situation I wanted to turn to God . But , I didn�t really have one . I saw nothing on TV but the looming war in Iraq , heard the word Jihad about every ten seconds , and saw a

mosque with a screaming Imam about every thirty seconds . So , I started reading again . I looked up website after website , started subscribing to Muslim newsgroups on the internet and looking for someone to talk to . Many of the emails that I sent and bulletin boards I posted on said the same thing . Just turn to Allah . If I did this , it would all make sense . One night after really thinking about this I had a dream . I am still not positive what it was , but it was an Arab man who did not use his name but told me to turn to Allah , pray , and life will make sense . The next day I said Shahada . The following day I found a Masjid . I went one night for prayer and found what I believe to be the one true path . The next night I returned and said the Shahada amongst my peers and we ate . Within two days my employer recalled me from lay off . I have received a substantial raise and the very real possibility to take a higher paying position within the same company and work on a better shift . I prayed heavily for my wife to see the straight way . She now is rapidly approaching reversion also . I believe that my life has only improved since my acceptance of Allah as my Lord and Islam as my faith . When my

. wife reverts Insha Allah , we will raise our children along the straight way

This is my conversion story . It is not earth shattering but , very personal and a . beautiful memory I hope to share

Holy Quran ۵ : ۸۴

And what (reason) have we that we should not believe in Allah and in the truth that has come to us , while we earnestly desire that our Lord should cause us to enter with ? the good people

Have you fully realized what Islam is ? It is indeed a religion founded on truth . It is� such a fountain-head of learning that several streams of wisdom and knowledge flow from it . It is such a lamp that several lamps will be lighted from it . It is a lofty beacon illuminating the path of Allah . It is such a set of principles and beliefs that will satisfy every seeker of truth and reality . KNOW YOU ALL ! That Allah has made Islam the most sublime path for the attainment of his supreme pleasure and the highest � . standard of His obedience

(Imam Ali (AS

About center

In the name of Allah

هَلْيَسْتَوِيالَّذِينَيَعْلَمُونَوَالَّذِينَلَايَعْلَمُونَ

?Are those who know equal to those who do not know

al-Zumar: ٩

:Introduction

Ghaemiyeh Computer Research Institute of Isfahan, from ٢٠٠٧, under the authority of Ayatollah Haj SayyedHasanFaqihImami (God blesses his soul), by sincere and daily efforts of university and seminary elites and sophisticated groups began its activities .in religious, cultural and scientific fields

:Manifesto

Ghaemiyeh Computer Research Institute of Isfahan in order to facilitate and accelerate the accessibility of researchers to the books and tools of research, in the field of Islamic science, and regarding the multiplicity and dispersion of active centers in this field

and numerous and inaccessible sources by a mere scientific intention and far from any kind of social, political, tribal and personal prejudices and currents, based on performing a project in the shape of (management of produced and published works from all Shia centers) tries to provide a rich and free collection of books and research papers for the experts, and helpful contents and discussions for the educated generation and all classes of people interested in reading, with various formats in the .cyberspace

:Our Goals are

(propagating the culture and teachings of Thaqalayn (Quran and Ahlulbayt p.b.u.t-

encouraging the populace particularly the youth in investigating the religious issues-

replacing useful contents with useless ones in the cellphones, tablets and computers-

providing services for seminary and university researchers-

spreading culture study in the publich-

paving the way for the publications and authors to digitize their works-

:Policies

acting according to the legal licenses-

relationship with similar centers-

avoiding parallel working-

merely presenting scientific contents-

mentioning the sources-

.It's obvious that all the responsibilities are due to the author

:Other activities of the institute

Publication of books, booklets and other editions-

Holding book reading competitions-

Producing virtual, three dimensional exhibitions, panoramas of religious and tourism- places

.Producing animations, computer games and etc-

Launching the website with this address: www.ghaemiyeh.com-

Fabricatingdramatic and speech works-

Launching the system of answering religious, ethical and doctrinal questions-

Designing systems of accounting, media and mobile, automatic and handy systems,- web kiosks

Holding virtual educational courses for the public-

Holding virtual teacher-training courses-

Producing thousands of research software in three languages (Persian, Arabic and- English) which can be performed in computers, tablets and cellphones and available and downloadable with eight international formats: JAVA, ANDROID, EPUB, CHM, PDF, HTML, CHM, GHB on the website

Also producing four markets named "Ghaemiyeh Book Market" with Android, IOS,- WINDOWS PHONE and WINDOWS editions

:Appreciation

We would appreciate the centers, institutes, publications, authors and all honorable .friends who contributed their help and data to us to reach the holy goal we follow

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Introduction of the Center – Ghaemiyeh Digital Library

